

AN ALBUM OF THE CHALK STREAMS



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BY

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AUTHOR OF 'CHALK STREAMS AND WATER MEADOWS,'
'RUNNING WATERS' AND 'A DOCTOR REMEMBERS'

WITH FORTY-SEVEN PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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DEDICATION

*This album is dedicated to
those kindly hosts and hostesses
who for so many years on so many waters
have given me such glorious fishing days
and also granted me permission
to record in photographs
some of the scenes
on their lovely Chalk Streams*



PREFACE

THE attraction of fly-fishing, more especially that connected with the dry fly, can become so absorbing that the addict is never completely happy unless he is on one of our chalk streams. Here it is not only the delight of deception—or attempted deception—of very educated fish, but these slow-moving chalk streams seem to hold a special enchantment, wholly their own. For they run through meadows more beautiful in their way than do the more rapid rivers of the North. Every locality has its special delights: for some the mountains and heather, for others the salmon rivers of Norway, but for me, the dreamy valleys between the chalk downs hold a peculiar fascination. Then too the water weeds and all that they nourish in the way of trout food are more abundant and prolific in the crystal clear chalk water, the river-side herbage is more opulent, and the flowers bordering the banks bloom with greater luxuriance and variety than in the limestone districts. The reed beds are an everlasting beauty either in summer, when the wind passes over them in waves of lighter green, or in the winter when they are golden and orange. Thus have I tried to present in this book, in black and white, some of the pictures which have appealed to me during the many years that I have spent beside these streams.

The photographs with the exception of two have all been taken on private waters: but where such kind permission to photograph has been granted there are some owners who are reluctant to have the beauty of their fishery advertised. This desire has been rigidly respected, and hence the exact locality of some of the pictures has not been indicated. The camera used was usually a five-by-four or quarter-plate size, which kindly keepers carried for me after I had previously selected the com-

P R E F A C E

position and chosen the time of day together with the appropriate lighting and other details. When the keeper was not available I have been compelled to use a delayed-action attachment to my shutter. The lens employed was always a Zeiss double protar, and nearly all the pictures were taken with a single component working at f. 12 at open stop, often cut down to f. 20. Thus, with appropriate light filter, the exposures were far beyond the possibilities of a hand camera. The single lens gives a narrower angle of view, avoiding the tendency towards the suppression of detail in the foreground. No films were used. The value of a figure in the composition depends on what mental concept the picture is intended to convey. In a fishing picture an angler is essential, but I have subordinated the figure to the surroundings in most of the photographs, though in a few I have made him the principal subject.

A few of these pictures have appeared in *The Field, Country Life*, the *Journal of the Flyfisher's Club* and in one or two fishing books, and I am grateful to the editors and authors concerned for their permission to reproduce them here.

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I. EARLY SPRING ON THE KENNET. *Frontispiece*

Above Hungerford the Kennet divides into small streams which all join up again before reaching the top end of the Hungerford water. The time is the first week in May and the water ranunculus has ventured to push forth but a very few tentative snowy blooms. The trees are very backward, only showing a few buds, for the season was very late. But the trout were in good condition, and the angler has taken his first fish of the year; weighed later it turned the scales at 3 lbs. 1 oz. for there are some big fish in this water,—though mighty shy. On this stretch of marshy land there is no cover at all where the field joins the water; and here have I crawled *ventre à terre* to get within reach of any rising fish,—a “creepy” business! Although far too deep to wade here, waders were a necessity, for the boggy fields in which one has to kneel would fill one’s gum-boots at once; also, waders are lighter in weight, provided that gum-slippers are used instead of brogues, and I always try to avoid every ounce of extra weight when fishing. To see some men loaded up like the White Knight in Alice’s Wonderland gives me pain, for I have friends who when fishing carry gear enough for ten, more than half of which is never used, and at the end of a long hot day grumble at their exhaustion. This fish fell to the early and large Spring Olive which was coming down at intervals in twos and threes and which were taken avidly by the fish. This was the only fish I had that morning: but then a fish of over three pounds so early in the season, when the rise is often so very short, should be enough to satisfy all but the most greedy.

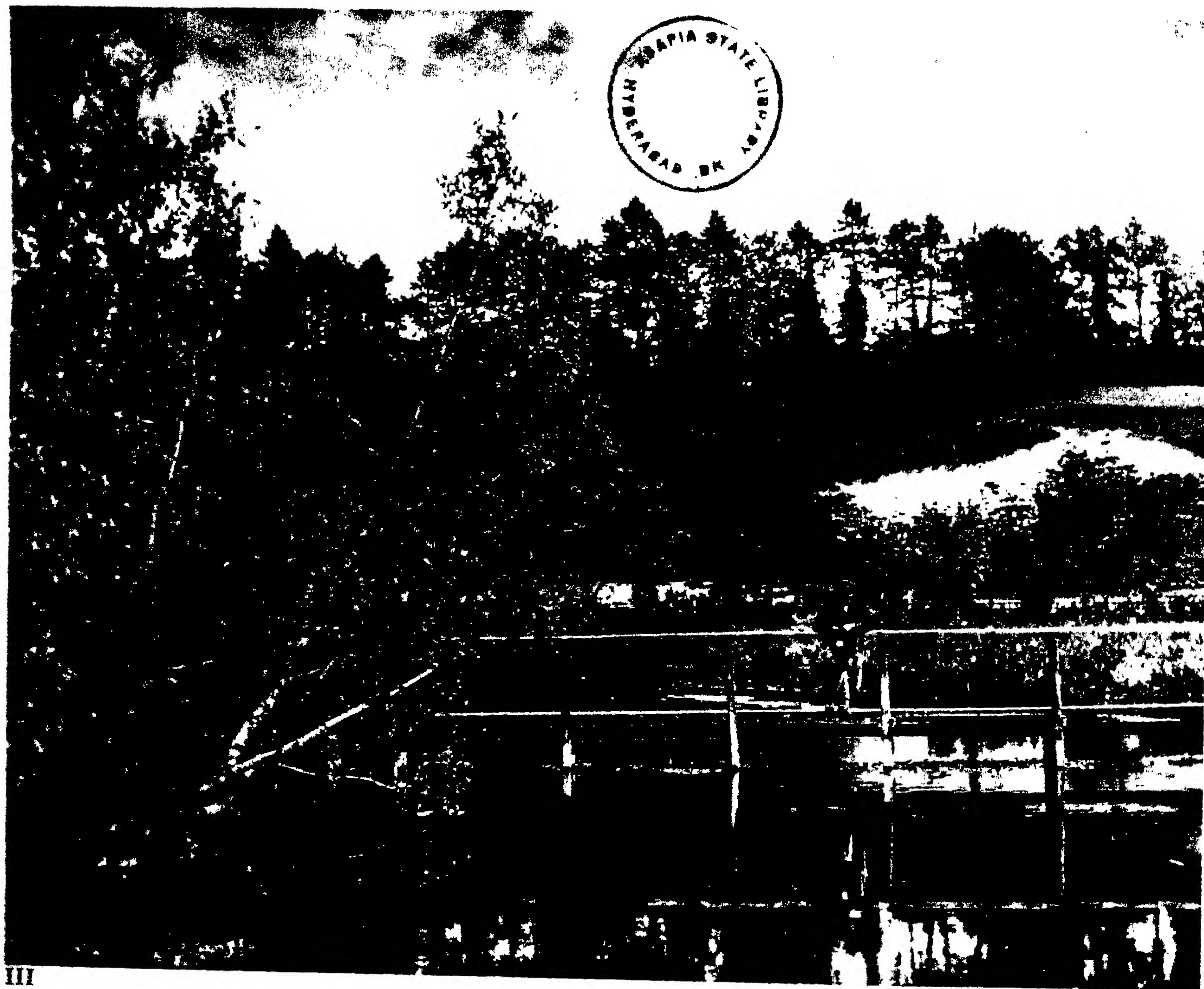
II. ON THE MIDDLE TEST

Here is seen one of the most beautiful reaches of the Middle Test, where the river broadens after its junction with the Anton below Testcombe Bridge. It was at this spot in the winter that when spinning for jack I hooked a big trout, though I was using a dead sprat large enough I thought to scare off any reasonable trout. After landing it, instead of knocking it on the head, as I should a jack, so anxious was I to return the fish unharmed that I took the slippery fish in my left hand below the gills and attempted to disengage the flight of hooks. But the active fish wriggled badly and, though I was as careful as possible, it gave an extra wriggle and fixed two hooks into my hand and a third into my wrist. And there was I firmly attached to an extra lively fish. Mercifully my hands were very numbed with the cold and the hooks too large to be driven in over the barb. I put the fish down and released it from the only hook by which it was caught, and returned it all but uninjured. Ever since then I have always carried a long-handled stout pair of forceps by which to release hooks in pike. These can be obtained very cheaply from any second-hand surgical instrument dealer.

But the time at which this picture was taken was late in August when the lush water-side herbage is in full growth. Under the overhanging tussocks and reeds in the foreground there were always in those days—a quarter of a century ago—two or three large trout feeding beneath them. What time have I wasted over them! What flies and points have those tussocks annexed! It was an awkward left-hand cast as the fish were right in close to the bank with the long tussock grass overhanging them. No fancy back-hand cast with the right arm was possible; so that crouched in the grass below, the left arm had to be outstretched over the water and only the wrist used in a horizontal switch. Anything like a vertical cast was hopeless. But events like these come back to one at night on the edge of dreams.



HYDEPARK (L.N.)



III. TUMBLING BAY. ON A CARRIER OF THE TEST BELOW FULLERTON

Why "Tumbling Bay" is not clear; there is nothing tumbling. Here is a deep pool between the camera and the foot-bridge, in which I once hooked a rainbow, so large that I could not get it into my net, and after a few attempts the hook came away and I saw it sink slowly back into the pool. Ever since that event there is no fish in the Test which could not be contained in the net I now carry.

It was here, standing on the foot-bridge where the figure leans in the picture, that I was spinning the pool for jack one February day. A huge fish chased my spoon right up to my feet; but as I was stark against the light he caught sight of me and retired. As he turned I knew it for a salmon. The following day I determined to go down again and have another go at him; but as I was leaving the house I had an urgent call to go and see a very sick man in the neighbourhood. I was with him all that day. But my host, a few days afterwards, took his spinning rod to the Tumbling Bay and hooked the salmon. He was spinning from the middle of the bridge. The salmon dashed right under his feet upstream and my friend passed his rod below the foot-bridge and raced after the fish along the bank. Suddenly the fish turned downstream and, of course, under the foot-bridge again. But it must have been very firmly hooked; for after another athletic scramble with the rod, my friend gaffed the fish weighing ten pounds, and—incidentally—eating very well. A lucky day!

The high ground seen in the distance is part of the hill over-looking Leckford, and the line of pine trees were planted to screen off some of the wild westerly gales from the fields above. The railway runs between the carrier and the hill.

IV. THE BIG ASH ON THE MAIN CARRIER, LECKFORD

This main carrier of the Test replaces the line of the old canal running to Southampton before the railways were made. Across the carrier and within twelve feet of the bank is the railway, and beyond this is the road to Stockbridge on which is seen the hawthorns. The canal was filled in with chalk cut from the hill in mid-distance, and the railway was constructed upon the filled-in canal. A curve of the main Test can be seen on the left hand of the picture, the water in which was some three feet below that in the carrier. But this carrier was always one of the best bits of fishing, and just opposite the big ash tree there was always a good fish rising. He was fairly safe till such time as I did a bit of "landscape gardening" and lopped off an overhanging branch which till then had made even horizontal casting a tricky business, and where I had previously left many flies and points in the branches in consequence. The fish in this carrier were very shy of anyone moving along the bank where so little cover was available; but as the bank sloped towards the main river one could keep more or less hidden by going half-way down the bank and casting over the top of the rushes and herbage to any fish rising under the further bank. Things were easier when fish were rising under one's own bank, but the big ones seemed always to be on the other side. Nor did the noise and shaking of the trains within a few feet of the fish appear to disturb their confidence. They were used to it and took no notice; but to haul out a two-pounder from under the carriage doors of a passing train always amused me, and also apparently the onlookers.



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V. THE TEST VALLEY FROM CHILBOLTON DOWN

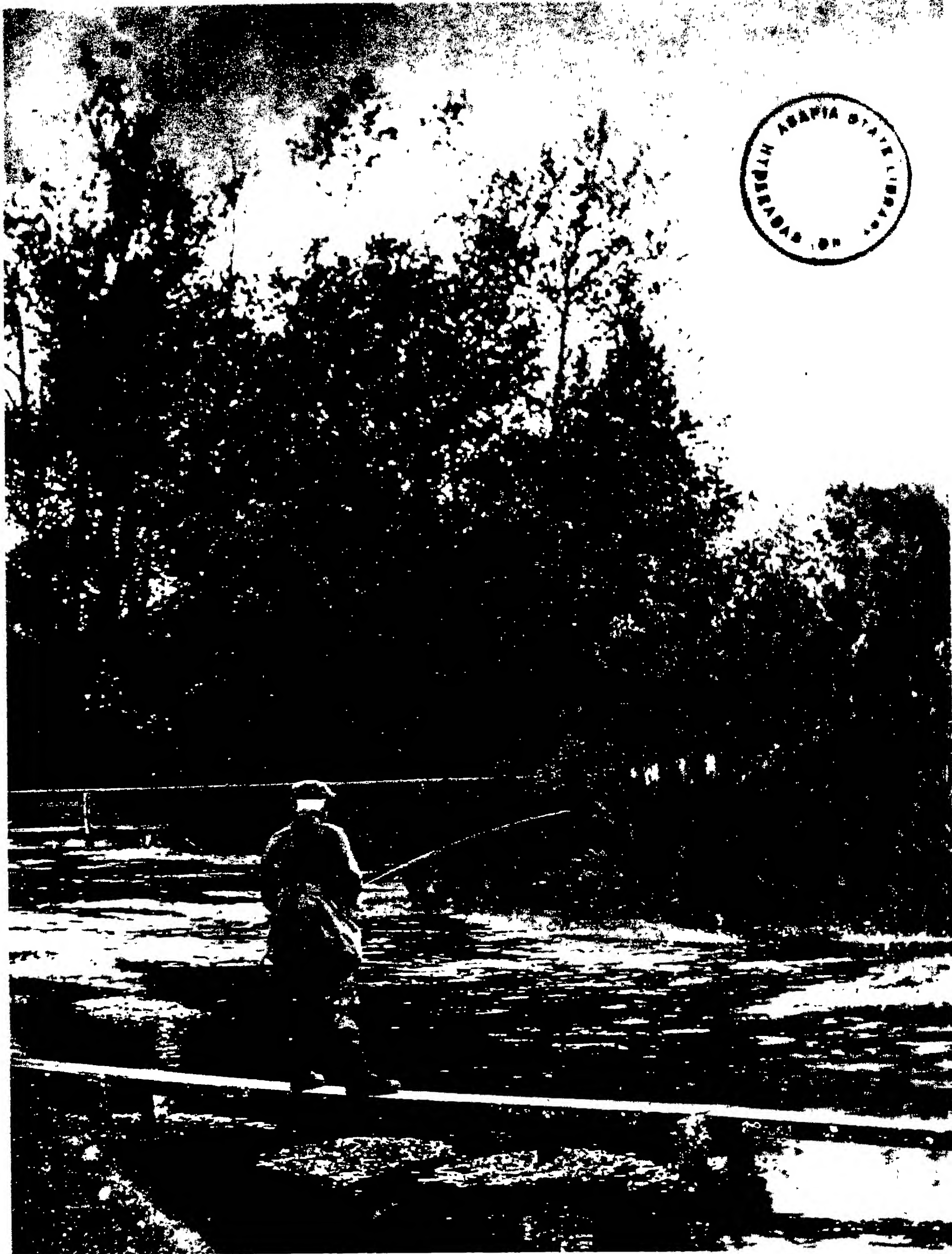
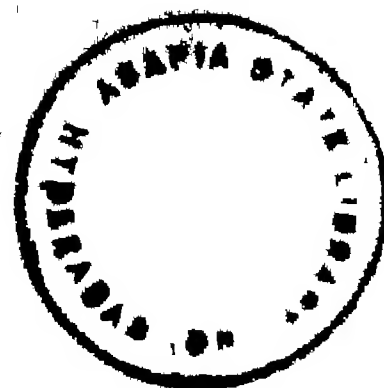
I am not fond of panoramic pictures; but this view from Chilbolton is interesting as showing the Test valley, with the river running through it. In the lower right-hand corner is seen the end of Testcombe Bridge under which the railway and the river run. The road here divides, one branch on the right going up the hill on which we stand to Chilbolton behind us. The other runs alongside the water till the river turns west, and on leaving it passes through Leckford, through Stockbridge, and then on to Southampton. On the right hand a few hundred yards below the bridge can be seen the junction of the Anton and the Test, beyond which are level marshes and reed-beds to the wooded hills of Longstock Park. A few yards below Testcombe Bridge the main river divides, one branch running close alongside the railway, the other and main stream passes the opening of the Anton and after half a mile turns away to the right while the carrier continues in the line of the old canal through Leckford to join the main river half-way between Leckford and Stockbridge. Those very distant hills are the high chalk downs by Salisbury.

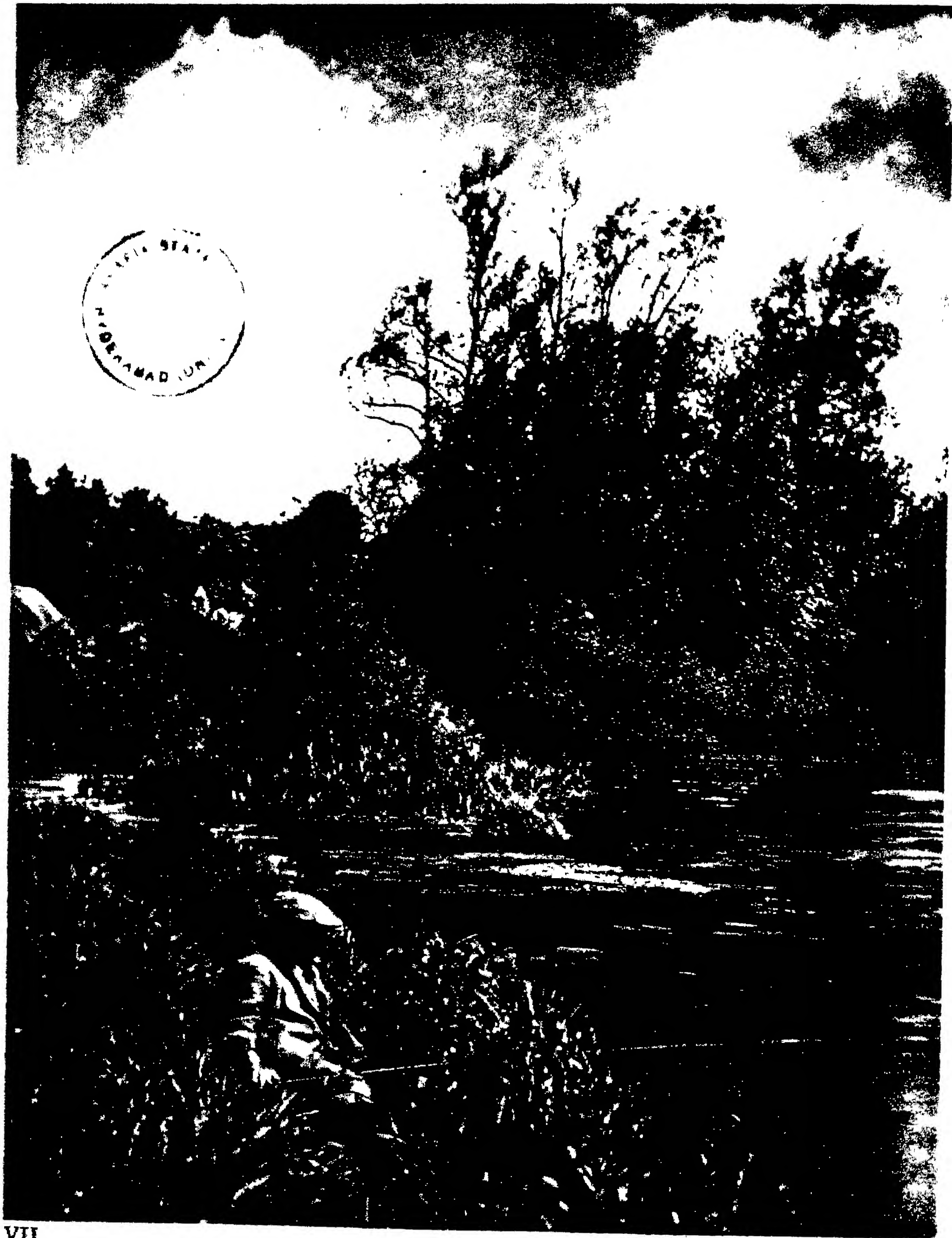
The picture was taken—as one sees—before the tarring of the roads and hence these show up brilliantly white. And how dusty these chalky roads could be if there were any wind, for sometimes the dust was many inches deep, and the coming of the car ploughed up this into a white mist. But alas, the tar has seeped into the rivers, and tar is a lethal poison to the trout. So that since the coming of the internal combustion engine with all the horrors connected with it, for which no convenience in the way of traffic can compensate, the trout fishing has degenerated, for the roads must run down the river valleys and the roads must be tarred. The authorities use asphalt sometimes, claiming that there is no poison in it. As the Scotch say, “I wonder.”

VI. BELOW CHILBOLTON FOOT-BRIDGE

Above Chilbolton the Test breaks up into a number of channels, but the largest, being the main stream, passes under the long wooden bridge. Below this bridge, part of which is seen in the picture, is a fine house, the lawn of which extends nearly up to the bridge. The angler is standing on a plank foot-bridge joining the lawn to an island behind him. Were he on the lawn, there is a big holly tree which would prevent him casting; whereas from the board he can just reach the top edge of a small island where a good fish was rising. He got the fish, and nearly fell in when netting it from the board, under which it tried to get downstream under his feet. And for an old man to scramble about on an eight-inch board, rotten and very shaky, requires some fancy balance; but he was a great gymnast in his youth and though nearly eighty is quite nimble.

It might be added that the Chilbolton water used to be good fishing; but the banks were—at any rate till lately—really dangerous, for an angler can suddenly sink many feet into the treacly mud lining the edges, and though finally he sinks on to the chalk as hard as pavement, he may find that he has sunk up to his arm-pits in an adhesive, clinging quagmire of the consistence of porridge and impossible to get out of without assistance. I have heard of an angler at Hungerford who during the evening rise fell into a runnel not eight feet across. He sank in above his waist and, unable to extricate himself, was there for three hours calling for help. He was finally dragged out half dead by his chauffeur, who had been searching for him to drive him home. Hence it is that a dog-whistle is no bad friend to carry in one's pocket when fishing amongst unfamiliar ditches.





VII. MAY-FLY TIME ON THE TEST

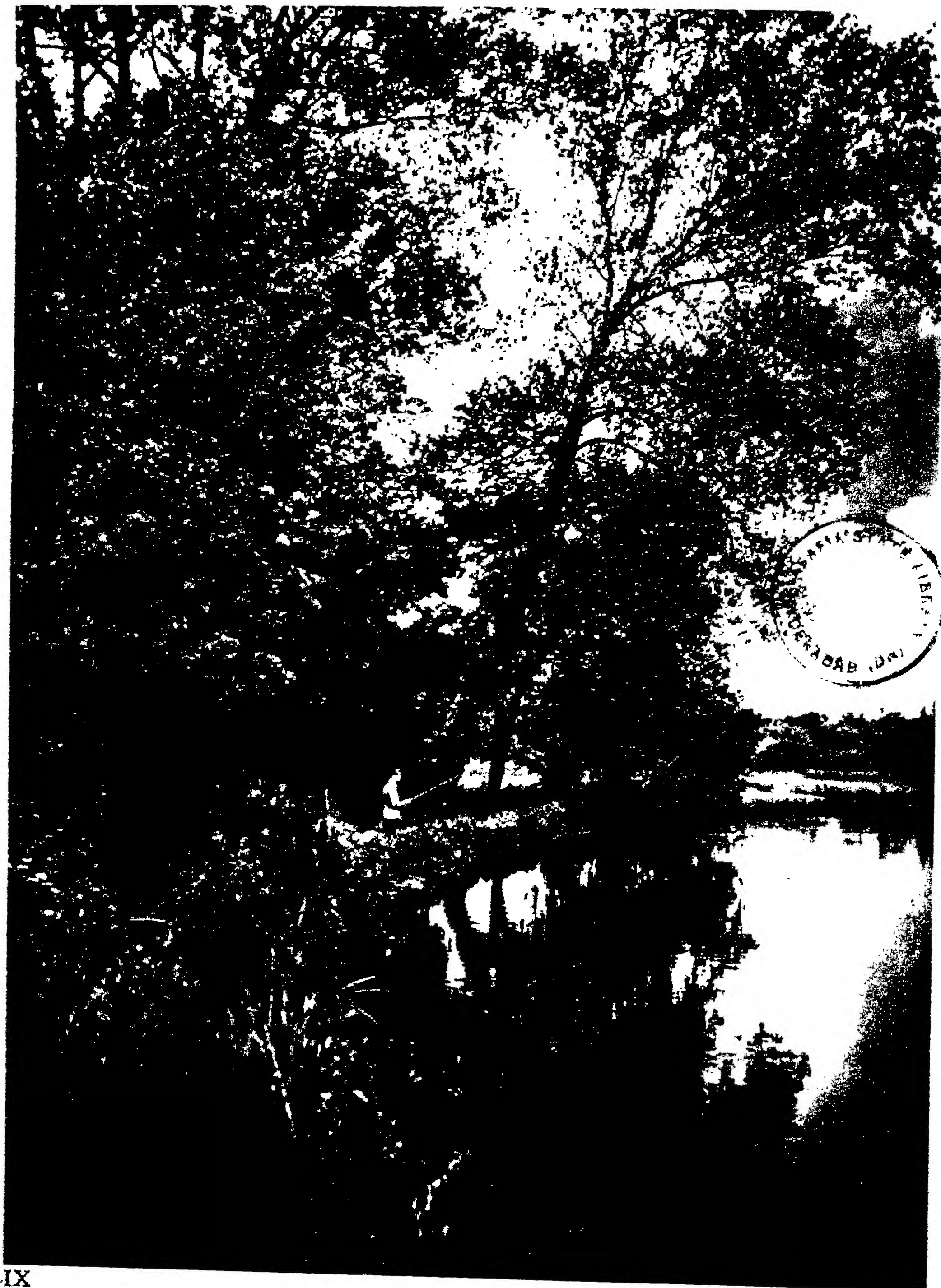
And here is some more of the long Chilbolton foot-bridge with the same angler resting on an island below it. It is the first week in June, and the water-buttercups wave their white blossoms in mid-stream on the shallows. There is nothing doing, and the angler is hot and tired, with not a May-fly to be seen. On the Test the May-fly is very local; long stretches of the river but rarely see one, whereas on other reaches sometimes there is a good hatch. "Good" did I write? Surely not; I should have said "evil," for after the May-fly fortnight is over the fish are so gorged that they lie torpid and uninterested in food for many weeks afterwards. Thus, where the May-fly is abundant good-bye to all chance of a really successful day after mid-June till September. But where there is no May-fly one may enjoy good fishing all through July and August, though perhaps not quite so good as during May and June, when the trout are hungry and recovering their weight after the winter. And unlike the ordinary duns which usually hatch out somewhere between ten o'clock and two the May-fly is not so punctual and will hatch out in countless myriads at any time in the day save the very early morning. But, even if no May-fly hatches out, for a town dweller to lie in the grass beside that lovely Test, with the swifts hawking back and forth over the water, the cry of the red-shank and plover protesting at his unwelcome presence, the lazy June clouds overhead, the scent of the water-mint; and all to the quiet song of the running water, makes one wonder if there is any place under Heaven to compare with that lovely valley.

VIII. A HUT ON THE LECKFORD WATER

This plate was exposed on Mid-summer day on beat 6 of the Leckford water on the Test. It was the coldest Mid-summer day I can ever recall. All the morning a wild gale from the north drove downstream with almost the suggestion of snow. I was dressed in my winter turn-out as if for spinning in February. Before starting I wondered if it were worth while dragging out my stand-camera with me from Stock-bridge, but as one cannot take a picture without a camera, I chanced it; for, as I have often done, I could at any rate bring back the outfit without exposing a plate all day. However, I determined to try to get a summer picture on a winter day. As the afternoon wore on the wind died down and I exposed a few plates in less exposed places.

Here in old days when I first knew this stretch there was a cow-bridge over the water broad enough to take a wagon, and if I remember right, a cart-track ran to Longstock, under the opposite hill. But now this foot-bridge, recently built, takes its place. The figure is that of the late Sir Frederic Still—the great child's physician—with whom I always fished when I could get him. We came back after an early dinner for the evening rise, but very few fish were moving until it was time to get home. Then it was that we left the water a-boil with good fish. I had only one good chance before 9.30, just above the foot-bridge. I rose and hooked a big fish which went all out upstream, when my line suddenly slackened and all was over. I found that my hook, though a No. 1, had broken at the bend. *Sunt lachrymae rerum.*





IX. UNDER THE BIG POPLARS ON THE HOUGHTON WATER

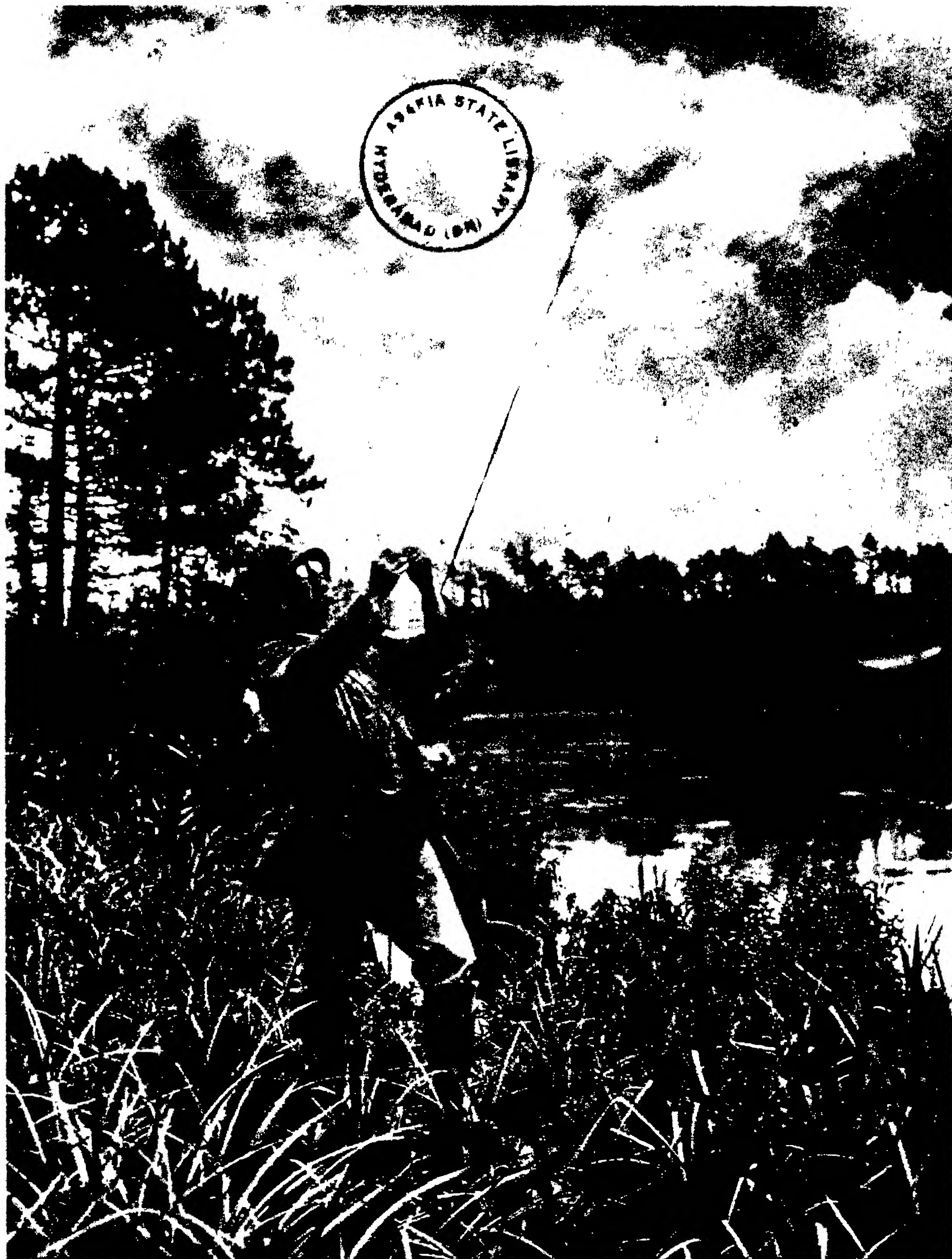
This picture is taken below Boot Island on the Test, about two miles below Stockbridge on the Houghton Club water. Of all our trees the two most decorative in shape are the elm and the black poplar, called "black" I presume to distinguish it from the aspen or white poplar, the leaves of which turn even whiter in the wind than do those of the black variety. But there is nothing black about the tree. The beauty of the tall black poplars lies not only in their curved branches and the lacey silhouette they make against the sky, but in the ever-moving leaves, which like all the poplar tribe are lighter in colour on the under side. The constant movement of the leaves of both black and white poplar is due to the flattening of the leaf-stalk at right angles to the plane of the leaf, and here it differs from other trees. Such flattening permits the lightest air to cause oscillation of the leaves. The marshy islands of the Test have many tall poplars whose roots cannot pierce the chalk, with the consequence that in a heavy gale, when the trees are in leaf, terrible havoc is sometimes created. In the picture I have placed a young fly-fisher beneath the trees in order to emphasise the immense contrast in size; indeed, as is seen, I have had to cut off the tops of the trees.

X. A KNOTTY POINT

A knot in one's point is a serious matter and should be unpicked at once. How often it is that on a day of wind the fly when cast on the water falls in the middle of a ring of gut, and in recovering the line a single thumb knot is made in the point. Therefore it is wise frequently to examine the cast to make sure that no such knot has occurred when fishing in foul weather. If unable to either unpick or undo the knot, this should be cut out and the ends rejoined. If this is not done, the probability is that the next fish hooked will break the gut at the knot.

Mr. Nuttall has shown by means of his Ballistic Tester, a most ingenious and accurate instrument, that a single thumb knot in gut reduces the breaking strain to as little as between 15 % and 17 % of the original gut strength. So that when a fish is lost with but little tension on the point, and the point therefore suspected of being of faulty quality, one cannot neglect the possibility of the unsuspected presence of a single knot in it. And while on the subject of gut, Mr. Nuttall proves that in the junction of two pieces one to another the double blood knot is superior in strength to all others by a considerable amount. There are fifteen ways of tying the double blood knot, but after testing them all he finds that the strongest is made by three and a half turns on each length. I knew him well and have tested with him many lengths of gut on his instrument. There is an empirical theory that gut maintains its strength by preservation in glycerine. This Mr. Nuttall was quite unable to prove; for gut, whether or not so 'preserved', degenerates in definite and progressive degree as it gets older.

The picture was taken on the Longstock Park water of the Test looking upstream.





XI. A MISTY AUTUMN MORNING ON THE TEST

On the early mornings on the Test in September the mist converts the scene into a fairyland of beauty. The willows are yellowing and all is seen through a steamy veil which clears up as the sun gets higher. But before then all the outlines of the trees are softened and the distance fades imperceptibly into the sky.

Mist is caused by the water being warmer than the air, or if put the other way round, the cooler air condenses the water vapour suspended in the air just above the water. In the evening, especially so when the nights are getting cold—as in autumn—the steam rises from the water in coils and clouds, or in long gauzy wraiths over the water-meadows. It is usual then for the angler to reel up and call it a day; for it is rarely that fish rise in a mist. This, no doubt, is due to the effect of the mist on the fly hatching at the time. The hatch, I presume, takes place as usual, for it is impossible for the nymph rising to the surface to foresee the presence of a mist above it. But having emerged from its envelope it finds that the droplets of mist cling to and clog its wings, compelling it therefore to seek refuge in the herbage. The presumption that this may be so is shown by the fact, which I have often experienced, that when, as sometimes we do, we see the mist ahead coming down the water we can catch fish until the mist actually reaches us. After which all is still.

If the angler, for some reason, is delayed in the meadows, and afterwards on his journey up the hill on his way home he turns round and looks back, the whole valley has become an enchanting vision with the tree-tops standing out above the smooth veil of white: and if there happens to be a bright moon, the scene is one never to forget.

XII. A JANUARY EVENING ON THE TEST

It is impossible to completely rid the rivers of jack however carefully the keeper kills them down with wire, trimmer, and even gun. And so it is that when in the early months of the year all the weeds are down, and before the jack push up into the small runnels and side-streams to spawn, it is pleasant on a bright day in the winter to spin down the water for any jack which have evaded the last netting in the autumn. One will not catch many in a well-keepereed water, but now and then one may have a lucky day, and a small jack makes delicate eating, for there is no taste of mud, as in all coarse fish, the jack being a discriminating feeder on the best of trout. A large spoon I find is as good as most other fancy lures; and this has the advantage of not being taken often by the trout. Even the small jack have mouths like a port-manteau and will snatch at what seems an impossible mouthful. But now and then one may hook a monster trout, probably cannibal, and then comes the difficulty of returning the trout uninjured to the water.

The picture was taken on the Leckford water where a reed-bed borders the stream. But an absolutely still day is needful for such a picture if, as in this one, a time exposure is given in the poor light. Otherwise the decorative dead reeds spoil the plate by swinging in the air. Those few still standing make a nice foreground against the grey of the leafless trees across the water.





XIII. THE SHALLOWS AT LECKFORD ON THE TEST

This large shallow marks the place where in ancient days the Old Test main river turned west towards Longstock instead of, as at present, turning South. (The picture faces West.) The Old Test runs under the distant willows and now is but a small stream which wanders amongst the many islands created by the frequent divisions of the river here, to join the main stream a mile lower down. In this broad valley, between Leckford under the hill on one side and Longstock, a mile across, the Test divides and subdivides the land into countless islands, only separated from each other by narrow runnels a few yards wide. No one disturbs the silence of these islands, save very few men in the winter after duck, vast numbers of which live in the great reed-beds of which the islands are composed. Unless one knows the geography of these islands it is quite easy to get marooned, for it is only here and there that a rotten plank, all but hidden in the herbage, bridges the broad ditches. Though these small side-streams but a few feet across have but two or three feet of water in them, below this water there are ten feet of treacly mud, from which, if one falls it is almost impossible to extricate oneself. Horses, cows and animals are missed and never seen again. It is an eerie place and never wise is it to wander there alone. I know no place in England like it.

The angler is fishing the gravel shallows, only a foot or so deep where there are plenty of grayling. The remains of an old foot-bridge are seen in mid-stream. Casting amid this tall herbage requires patience, and the longish cast needful to reach the middle of the water so often gets caught up behind. To have to push one's way fifteen yards through a dense tangle of herbage and nettles, eight feet high, in order to release one's fly—and this every few casts—does not make for that attitude of mind essential to successful angling.

Just above where the railway at Fullerton passes over the Test I had on one early spring day a great desire to spin the water where I knew that some big jack had found sanctuary. The heavy floods during that winter made a record; the fields were flooded for miles and the Test was running strongly. I had great difficulty in getting to it in my gum-boots through mud well over a foot deep everywhere.

It was just a few yards above this spot that I hooked my only jack, and that a small one. I had hardly placed it in my bag when I stepped into a deep mud hole, unseen by being filled with water. I was in the mud well above my knees and fell forward on to my side in the mire. I could not get out, for as I tried to raise one leg the other sank in the deeper. Finally, I lay in the mud and water, and at last got one leg out of its gum-boot which was quite invisibly submerged. I groped in the mud and at last felt the boot top. I dragged it out, scooped out the mud with my hands, all the while lying on my side. Then I did the same with the other leg, emptied out the mud, got into my boots again, grabbed my rod and plodded up the hill to Chilbolton, seen in the distance. I was unrecognisable, soaked to the skin, and caked in mud from forehead down. Arrived at the house, the gardener got a shovel and scooped off the worst of the mud, after which I went barefoot up the back stairs for bath and change. And I needed it.

The picture was taken with a delayed-action shutter, as I had not the heart to bring the keeper, only in gaiters, to assist me. I exposed other plates, but the tripod legs in the mud sank, one or other, giving me false views.

XV. GRAYLING TIME ABOVE ROMSEY ON THE TEST

It is early November, and the big elms across the water are a cloud of yellow gold, save on the left where the wind has blown the leaves away and the branches are prepared to ride out the winter gales under bare poles. The day was calm and still, indeed so silent that one might hear the distant sounds far away, the ploughman calling to his horses on the hill, or the noise of the railway a mile off. In the picture the angler has just begun his morning with anticipation full and bag empty, for there are plenty of grayling in this very fast water.

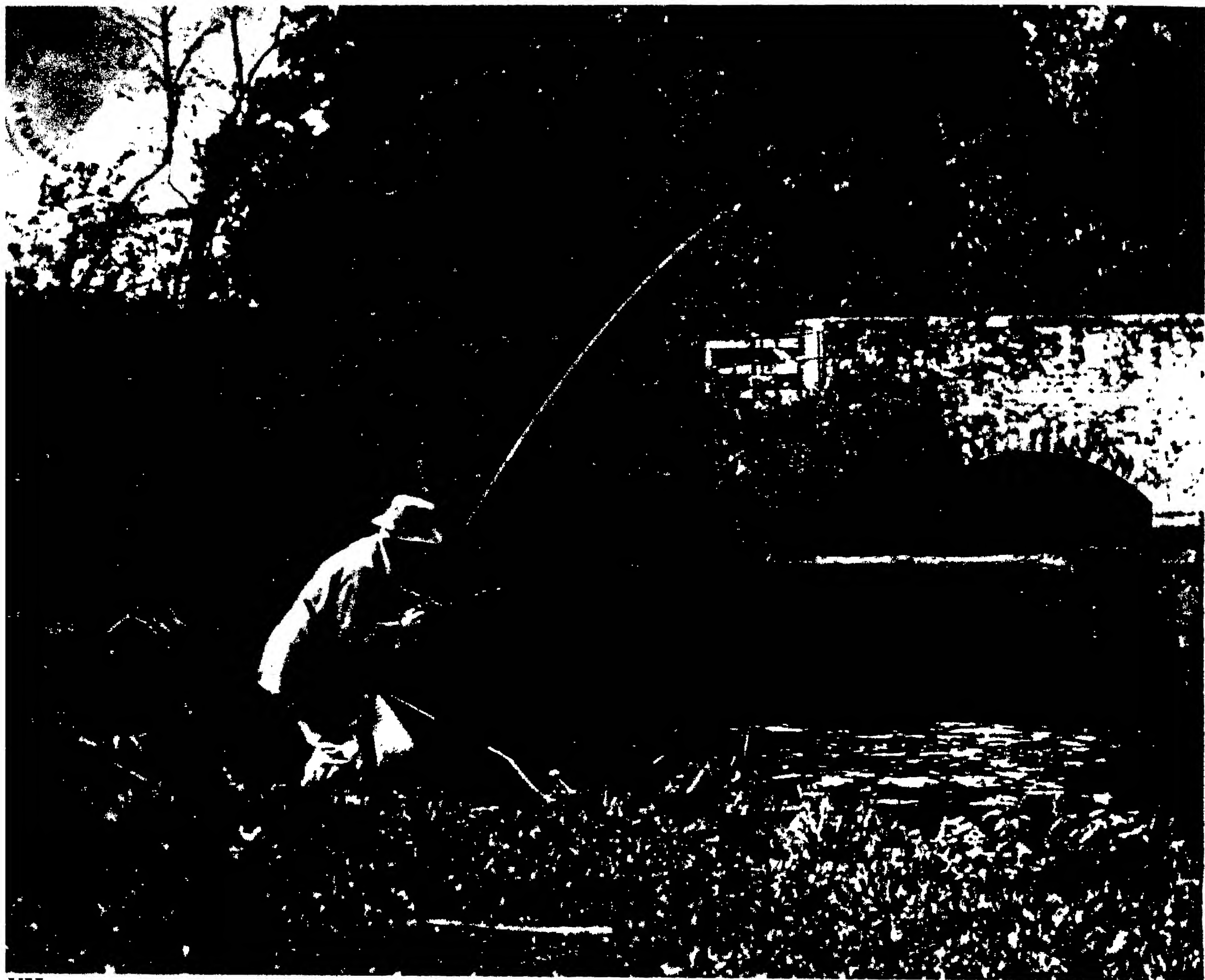
Most other anglers on the Test look on grayling as a curse in their water: but there are some wiser men in the lower Test who, knowing that they cannot remove all the grayling, compromise by setting aside a certain portion of their river for the grayling only. So that when most other anglers have stripped their reels at the end of September and put aside their gear for the winter, these prudent fishermen can angle for nine months of every year. Personally, I enjoy grayling fishing almost as much as I do for trout, for I like to wander down the well-known reaches with a rod, when the monotonous green of summer has changed to the gorgeous rainbow tints of autumn, and pity the poor wretches who from prejudice are debarred from this enjoyment. At such a time the grayling are at their best, both for sport and also for the table. On these cool days one can fish all day without fatigue, and very often there is quite a good evening rise at sedges and late moths. The days are short and all is over well before dinner time. Grayling are excellent eating all the year round, and a master chef told me that to remove the tough skin before cooking, the fish should be immersed for no more than two minutes in boiling water, after which the skin is easily removed and the fish then can be cooked in numberless ways.

XVI. BOOT ISLAND BELOW STOCKBRIDGE ON THE TEST

Boot Island is a small island in the main Test opposite a field belonging to the Boot Inn across the meadow. The Inn is about two miles below Stockbridge and a not infrequent bus passes the Inn. In war-time when no cars were available the bus was indeed a godsend. The Boot Inn was much used by members in the early days of the Houghton Club before they made their headquarters at Stockbridge.

The day on which this picture was taken was a hot, muggy, still day, and the time was 3 p.m. There was absolutely nothing doing, and I was thankful for the keeper's strong back by which to carry my camera, tripod and etceteras. My rod and gear were quite enough for my old shoulders. On the left-hand edge of the print will be seen a hut where I put up my rod and also set up my camera on its legs. The banks of the river are so soft that the cattle would trample them into mud unless protected by wire. But as such protection would deprive the thirsty cattle from getting a drink, an artificial bay is cut out of the bank which allows the water to flow under the wire. Such a bay is seen behind the angler in the picture. Here we waited for a time to see if anything moved. At length we gave up all hopes of fishing and centred our attention on a picture of the place—and here it is.





XVII. BELOW LEVERTON BRIDGE

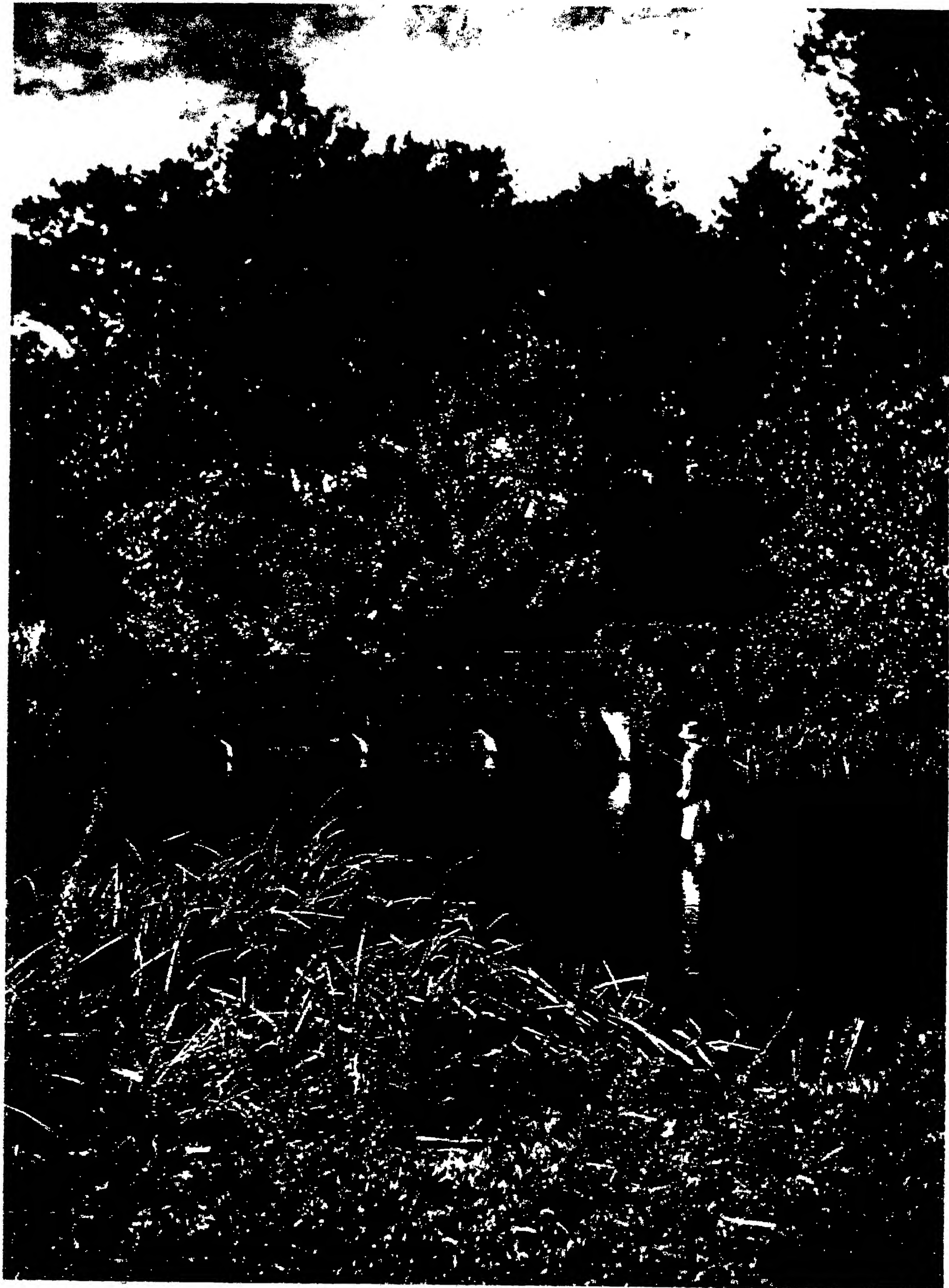
The Leverton Bridge in the Kennet is a small brick bridge which carries a right-of-way between two roads, one of which runs between Hungerford and Ramsbury while the other goes to the big house at Chilton. The bridge is broad and solid enough to take farm carts to the fields in the valley. Beneath the bridge flows a branch of the river which joins the main stream lower down. We are facing upstream and the pool is very shallow, being only a foot or two deep. But there are some large fish who feed just under the arches, making any cast to them more than difficult as the fly generally lights on their tail. Also they seem to have eyes in their tails, for approach is a problem not easily solved, and it is very difficult to get near one unseen, and when once seen, a few feet up the arch makes them secure.

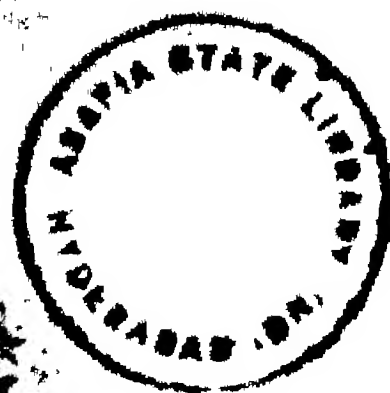
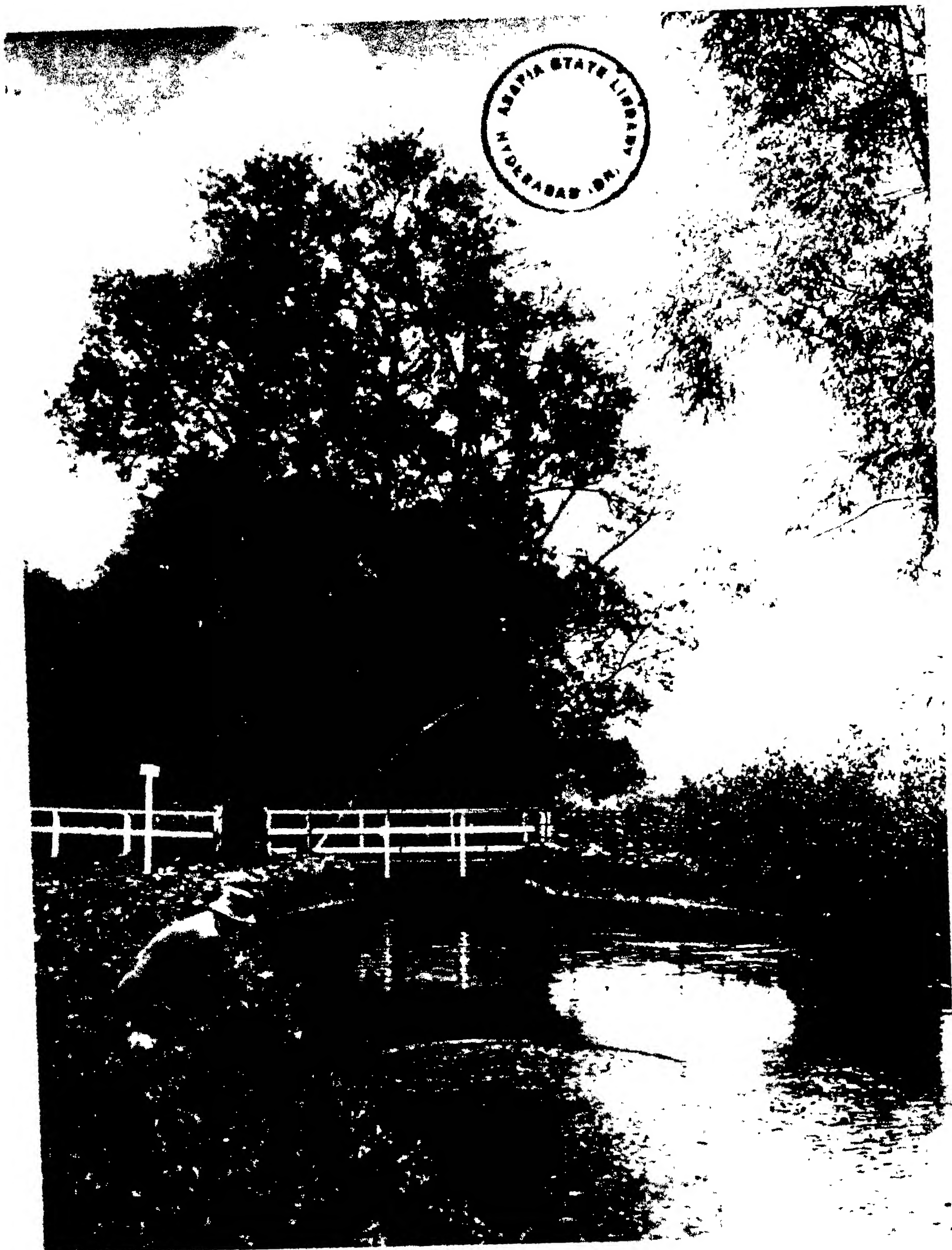
The angler seems somewhat in a hurry to net his fish which is hardly yet quiet enough to net. His bass fish-bag which seems to be fairly full has slipped round, and will trip him up unless he is careful. Such a bag—much lighter than the usual cumbrous bag attached to the leather or webbing sling—has many advantages. It is suspended from the webbing by a spring clip, so that when actually kneeling to cast it can be unclipped and laid down, saving the drag on the shoulders, or can be carried by hand which is often less tiring on the long walk home. True, the bass “frail,” as it is called in some places, is soon worn out, but can be renewed for a few pence at any fishmonger’s. The tackle makers—and sellers—would like the angler adorned with a fishing-bag replete with endless compartments, but such a bag smells to Heaven when in constant use; whereas it is not ruinous to have a clean frail every day; also, one can send away one’s fish in it by train or post much more satisfactorily than in paper.

XVIII. EVENING RISE AT LEVERTON BRIDGE

Whenever I peeped over the edge of the parapet of Leverton Bridge, and if I was very careful in doing so, I could generally see under the right-hand arch in the picture a personable trout of some proportion which shot upstream under the arch at the slightest alarm.

I was staying at Hungerford, and the generous owner of the water gave me two days' fishing. At about 7 p.m. one June evening I crossed the bridge, and seeing my friend in his usual place I went round into the field below, stepped very gingerly into the water, to avoid all ripple, and moved slowly to casting distance. But after my second cast he must have had some inkling that all was not well, and stopped feeding, presumably bolting into his funkhole of refuge. The only way to secure such a fish would have been by a dirty trick related to me by a skilled poacher, but one which I should scorn to use on a host's water. This requires an accomplice to remain on the bridge in order to aid the angler. The fisherman, standing well below, casts his line on to the bridge where it is taken up by the bridge-hand who attaches to the middle of the cast a length of black thread after finding the exact length by which he can dap the angler's fly on to the water. Thus, the angler's line is held attached to the thread tied by the man on the bridge. The latter then peeps over the coping and waits till the fish—usually falling back tail first to his old position—drops downstream. He withdraws his head on seeing the tail and compels the angler's fly to perform a *pas seul* just above the fish. It is usually at once seized, when the angler, who alone can tell when, gives a yell, the thread is let go—and then the game begins.





XIX. THE LAST STRUGGLE

This is the critical moment. The fish has not broken surface before, but now, instead of keeping deep down, is becoming exhausted and being brought to the top. The angler is rather impatient, for although not seen because hidden by the grass, his left hand holds his net, already submerged, in his anxiety to lift out a fish not yet really ready for his net. Such impatience sometimes loses the fish at the net, the extra strain on the gut tearing out the fly.

How often it is that the smaller the carrier the greater the difficulty of approach unobserved. It is not only that the small carriers are often shallower than the main, but the fish seem more aware of danger in the narrower environment, possibly being conscious of a more limited opportunity of escape. And again, when on a cautious approach to the edge a "banker," unseen till one is over it, shoots upstream creating a *sauve qui peut* amongst the rest. This becomes infectious and the narrow stream is clear of fish in no time. Hence it is that all caution must be taken in the approach to a narrow stream in case one steps on a banker—and bankers as a race, above or below water, take no risks. But when the damage is done, crawl backwards into the grass, light a pipe and wait; or, better still, avoid the pipe and lie prone amongst the tussocks, motionless, till the fish return—as they nearly always do.

The picture is taken on a side stream below Leverton Hatches on the Kennet where a foot-path crosses the river above the hatches between the main Bath road and Leverton.

XX. IN THE HEAT WAVE

In September 1929 or '30—I forget which—we had an intense heat wave and I was staying at Hungerford on the Kennet. The Lord of the Manor owning the water next above the Hungerford Town water generously gave me a couple of days on his portion of the river. The water was as carefully preserved as Hampton Court Gardens, and was full of big trout. But the May-fly hatch that year had been a large one and all the fish were gorged and comatose. The day was roasting hot and towards the afternoon a few menacing cumuli riding high in the blue threatened a coming thunderstorm. The leaves, even the aspens, were motionless and the sun blazed down on the parched fields with almost a sensible pressure. The river was very low, and the floating weeds spread their matted carpets wherever the water shallowed.

My day had been absolutely blank. I had not seen a single trout rise, though here and there small and restless grayling put up at intervals. And yet my day had not been quite entirely blank for I had cast at and hooked a grass snake as it swam across the stream. I lifted it out of the water by my cast, and was surprised to find how tough is the skin of a snake, for I had some difficulty in extracting the hook, after which it wriggled away uninjured. Otherwise it was a blank day. And yet I enjoyed it thoroughly; for it is not all of fishing to fish. There were some young tufted duck to observe, then there was the effect of the heat on the rooks seen to be gasping with open beaks as they quartered the baked fields; there were oxygen bubbles rising from the starwort, and everywhere were rising from the river-bed masses of dark brown mould, raised by their air bells and forming on the surface a foul covering, like door mats. I understand that most of this substance is composed of diatoms.





XXI. THE OLD MILL, RAMSBURY

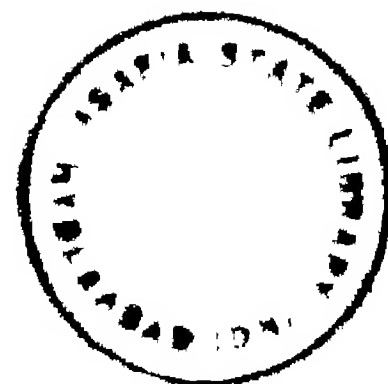
Ramsbury on the Upper Kennet is a very ancient village, and the mill must be over six hundred years old. But for many years now, ever since corn is ground by rollers instead of between mill-stones, the Kennet mills have been for the most part out of use, and for the simplest of all reasons, namely that they do not pay. Even though the motive power costs nothing, yet the work is unremunerative. Therefore the "Old Mill" fell into senility, till someone with an eye to beauty restored the building and converted it into a most charming residence. The picture shows the downstream side of the mill, and the water still runs beneath the house.

The main stream runs over what was of old a spill-weir above the mill, between which and the smaller mill-stream here shown, is a most lovely garden of pergolas and climbing roses, with the lawn running down to the main river. Only the border of this garden can be seen facing the figure in the foreground. Ramsbury is a village of beautiful gardens, and the mill garden is one of the show ones. Winter or summer the mill is one of the most restful places that I know, and a number of noted anglers of the past have resided here. E. M. Halford did much of his classic work here on the dry fly. To his illuminating investigations we owe so much in the popularity of the dry fly; though his prejudice against the use of any other means of taking trout in chalk streams still lingers in the hesitation by many conservative anglers to the adoption of the use of the nymph on appropriate occasions. But thanks to the later work by G. E. M. Skues this prejudice is fast dissolving, and a broader view is now taken by most of the younger intelligent anglers. Plunket Greene has written in delightful prose of this bit of the Kennet in his charming book, *Where the Bright Waters Meet*.

XXII. THE KENNET BELOW RAMSBURY

Below Ramsbury the Kennet flows through one of the loveliest valleys in England, and the great chalk hills on the south side supply the springs which help to keep the water fairly level throughout the summer. As in all chalk streams supplied by underground springs the water is always very much colder than in those rivers supplied by surface springs or by alluvial drainage. Trout seem to thrive best too in the colder water. This picture was taken on a September afternoon on one of those misty days when all Nature seems asleep, and the cows and cattle under the trees are eternally restless under the constant irritation of the flies. All is silent; the birds are still, and a breathless heat smothers all energy. On such an afternoon the rise of a trout becomes an event, whereas the grayling in mid-stream break the surface here and there; and when a grayling rises under the bank, imitating exactly the rise of a trout, and one has crept and crawled to casting distance and, after much heat and effort, netted out a ten-inch grayling, then it is that the angler may be forgiven for the use of language which can shock even himself.

Here am I preparing to cast to a fish rising under the opposite bank but before doing so am conscious of being photographed, and knowing that my rod is vibrating I tried to stop this with my left hand, but the plate was exposed before I could withdraw it. However, the print gives the sense of peaceful serenity of a place where Nature is bountiful, and where life may be made to run more smoothly than in the panting turmoil of town.





XXIII. THE LOWER END OF THE RAMSBURY WATER

Just above the top of the Littlecote water, and at the lower end of the Ramsbury water on the Kennet, the great elms and beeches hang out over the stream, and in the dark shade beneath some big trout lie, fattened no doubt, during the absence of hatching flies, by the variety of succulent morsels vouchsafed from the trees above.

The picture was taken in early September, and I have come down with the keeper after dinner to pay my respects to the fish under the trees. But alas! either the erection of my camera together with the needful movement consequent on my choice of subject must have put down the fish, for though I watched carefully and cast a likely fly on chance I had no response. A little higher up, and after I had dismissed the keeper with my camera, I crawled behind the rushes and had a better time: but here the stream widens out considerably and it needs a long cast to get under the opposite bank where the trout were rising.

It is far too early yet for the full splendour of the evening rise which only takes place at dusk, though here and there a fish may be inclined to sample a spinner. I knew therefore that there would be little doing, but I came down early in order to get a better light on my subject before settling down to the serious business of the evening. This is what I took, before sending the keeper back with my camera. It may be noticed by photographers that emphasis, by which I mean acuity of focus, is placed on the figure and the foreground, while the trees and background are slightly blurred, so that their structure rather than their detail is suggested. The lens being a narrow-angled one, together with a yellow screen, the exposure was a long one in order to get detail in the shadows under the trees.

XXIV. WAITING FOR THE MIST TO CLEAR

This was taken in early October, above the weed rack at the bottom end of the Ramsbury water on the Kennet, when the trout fisher has put aside his gear and has left the grayling to the angler who makes no claim to purism. I recall this day, which broke in a heavy mist, and it was a nice point as to whether I should go four miles on the chance of the fog clearing. For grayling do not rise well in a fog; trout hardly ever do so. However, I chanced it—as I generally do—and till midday sat on the seat waiting. All was very still, so much so that I could hear what the keeper was talking about to some man in the road a quarter of a mile away, for fog conveys the sound just as water does. After midday the mist gradually dissolved and became thinner and thinner till from a pale blue sky the sun shone down quite hotly, encouraging some fly to hatch out, and business began. I was implored to kill all grayling whatever the size, and as there was a fair number in the water I brought home a bag of various sizes from eighteen inches to that of what is dubbed a “cat-fish,” by which is meant the size appropriate to the appetite of a cat.

October is my favourite time for grayling, and where these fish are plentiful, they rise all day, wet or fine; in fact I have had some of my most remunerative days in pouring rain. Wind is a far worse bane, for it is so difficult to see the rise amongst the little waves, the rise of a grayling often being so much smaller than that of a trout.





XXV. A SMALL CARRIER ON THE RAMSBURY WATER

As I came up a small carrier on the upper Kennet I could see from behind the rushes in the foreground a fish lying deep on the bottom in the clear water just at the corner where the pool opens. Believing it to be a trout I spent much time in trying to coax it to take an interest in my efforts. At long last, wearied by my fruitless attempts, I wished to throw a stone at it; but smothering this inclination I decided that I would go round and get a look at it. I crept across the planks and finally standing up I raised my head slowly to see over the herbage. Pushing aside the small willow I found that my "trout" had become a small jack. No wonder that he took no notice of my fly! The keeper with me exposed the plate.

It is often difficult to distinguish in a poor light between a jack and a sleeping trout or grayling when lying on the bed of a stream, but when fly or nymph or other attraction is totally disregarded, one may begin to suspect that the fish is no trout—and occasionally curiosity confirms this. It is a nice point whether fish actually do sleep; and I am inclined to think that they do so. Of course they cannot shut their eyes for there are no eyelids. And yet how not infrequently one comes across a fish lying quite motionless on the river-bed until one nearly steps on it. Under such circumstances it seems that, even if asleep, the eyes are still responsive to stimulation; for if one's shadow passes across the fish it generally becomes alarmed. Again, the lateral line seems awake enough to react to any careless walking along the bank, creating sufficient vibration to arouse the fish. Creeping up quietly, I have actually poked one with my rod tip before it streaked away in panic.

The Nadder above Bemerton was in full flood that dull misty February day, and the water was out all over the meadows; but it is on such a day that if the photographer is brave he may record some very beautiful pictures. The mist pushes back the middle distance and emphasises the different planes, while the distance itself is obliterated.

I had dragged my heavy camera and tripod through the floods at the imminent risk of stumbling into some unseen pot-hole and falling into a foot of water, to the destruction of my apparatus and no little inconvenience to myself, when I came on this scene, with my host patiently and hopelessly spinning for jack in the narrow carrier between himself and the reeds opposite. For in the early spring the jack make for the small streams and backwaters where they spawn, and if one can cast a cunning spoon dexterously, one may—or more likely not—be successful. In the floods the chances are greatly diminished, for, the water being turbid, the fish are unable to see the lure. But on that day I was not after fish, but a picture, and here the setting and background were superb. The vivid green of the short grass pushing through the flood, the raw sienna tint of the dead reeds reflected in the water, the distant naked willows half hidden by the nacreous pearly grey of the luminous mist, all combined to make a picture which even in monotone was worth all the trouble I had taken. The light was very bad, but my friend stood rigid for half a second, enabling me to get what I wanted.

These runnels are impossible to net, and it is only when the water is clear and the floods run down that, by walking delicately and with circumspection, may the sharp eye detect Mr. Esox asleep and still in his nursery. Then, with gun, or wire, or triangle may his doom come upon him suddenly, after which if not too large he may make a most satisfactory addition to dinner if cooked by one skilled in the art of stuffing and basting.





XXVII. FISHING IN A GALE AT RAMSBURY

No angler minds a wet day if properly dressed for it, and I have enjoyed glorious times with the fish in the rain. But wind, and especially if it is strong, is quite another matter. I think that the worst wind is that which blows directly from the opposite bank. True it drives all the fly under one's own bank, but casting to a fish rising there is often very difficult. If one allows for the wind and it suddenly ceases one's fly goes anywhere, while if one does not allow for it, a gust blows one's fly into the herbage on the bank, the recovery of which so often puts down the fish. A wind dead downstream is better than a cross wind, for though one's casting distance may be less there is not so great a chance of that everlasting and pesky nuisance of being caught up in overhanging herbage. An upstream wind creates such wavelets that it is difficult to see the rise, but one can at any rate cast easily.

There is only one wind however that used to make me nervous. This is a wind of some force blowing from one's right-hand side when casting a long line directly across the water. I was so often hooked by my fly, either in the face, or neck or clothes, and this is how such accident happens. Under calm conditions the back cast of one's line on recovery goes out directly behind one, but in a strong wind from the right the line is driven down wind far to the left behind. Then in the forward cast the line is apt to encircle one and the hook comes with great force either into one's clothes or person. Until I taught my left hand to know what my right hand doeth I was far too often hooked; but now, under the circumstances related, my left hand takes over, and on recovery my line going far to the left behind me, is out of danger of hooking myself during the forward cast.

The picture is taken at the big weir by the keeper's cottage at Ramsbury in a whole gale. So violent was it that I could hardly stand upright in the water. At times my mackintosh was blown over my head and my hat into the water.

XXVIII. ABOVE THE TOWN BRIDGE, STOCKBRIDGE

It is pleasant to stay at the Grosvenor Hotel at Stockbridge as a guest of the Houghton Club, and to fish the carefully preserved water there. I took down my camera with me as I knew that a kindly keeper would carry my tripod and my heavy accessories, while I should take my rod; and we began just upstream of the town bridge. Were I busy composing a picture and the keeper to see a rising fish the composition would have to wait where it was while I attended to the more urgent call. Then, the fish landed and that incident closed, I could give my undivided attention to my camera. The subject just above the bridge looked as though it had composed itself, with the willow herb brightly lit in the foreground against the dark shadow of the trees, and I started to set up my camera. I had just finished when the keeper, whose eyes were ever on the water, pointed to a rising fish just above the outlet of a small runnel which empties itself fifty yards upstream of the bridge. The trout accepted my Iron Blue as though it had been waiting for it, and after a fierce protest was gently lifted ashore. So I told the keeper to release my shutter when I was removing the hook. And here I am.

It was at this very spot that Plunket Greene described in his book *Where the Bright Waters Meet* how he was casting to a fish rising exactly where mine did, while the bridge during the 1914-18 war was crowded with Australian soldiers gibing and hooting at him for failing to catch it. When finally he hooked it the soldiers' enthusiasm was boundless, and Greene played it longer than was necessary simply to amuse them. Finally he landed it and tossed it to the men on the bridge, inducing a mad scramble for it, during which they were nearly killed by a lorry tearing across the narrow bridge at full speed.





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XXIX. SPINNING AT LECKFORD

Here we see an angler in the reed-beds in late winter. The weeds are all down and the day was one of those still days that we sometimes get in mid-February when the thrushes are in song, and the plovers in new crest somersault and flicker over the marshes. Through the unruffled clear water we see the emerald green cushions of young starwort on the gravel, and as the angler winds in his spoon he sees it glitter and flash against the dark river-bed. So still was the day that the few tall feathery reeds which had withstood the gales of winter were motionless, and I enjoyed the luxury of photographing these decorative objects with a stand-camera and a long exposure in the poor light. There are very few days when this can be done, for often on what seems a draughtless day the reeds on their thin stems bend and bow to the faintest breath. But sport was poor, for the keepers had netted out all the pike above net-mesh size in the autumn, leaving only some chance old and wise jack who dived below the net as it came over him. But it is getting towards spawning time and some pike will snatch at anything bright and moving swiftly through the water, provided always that he does not see the angler.

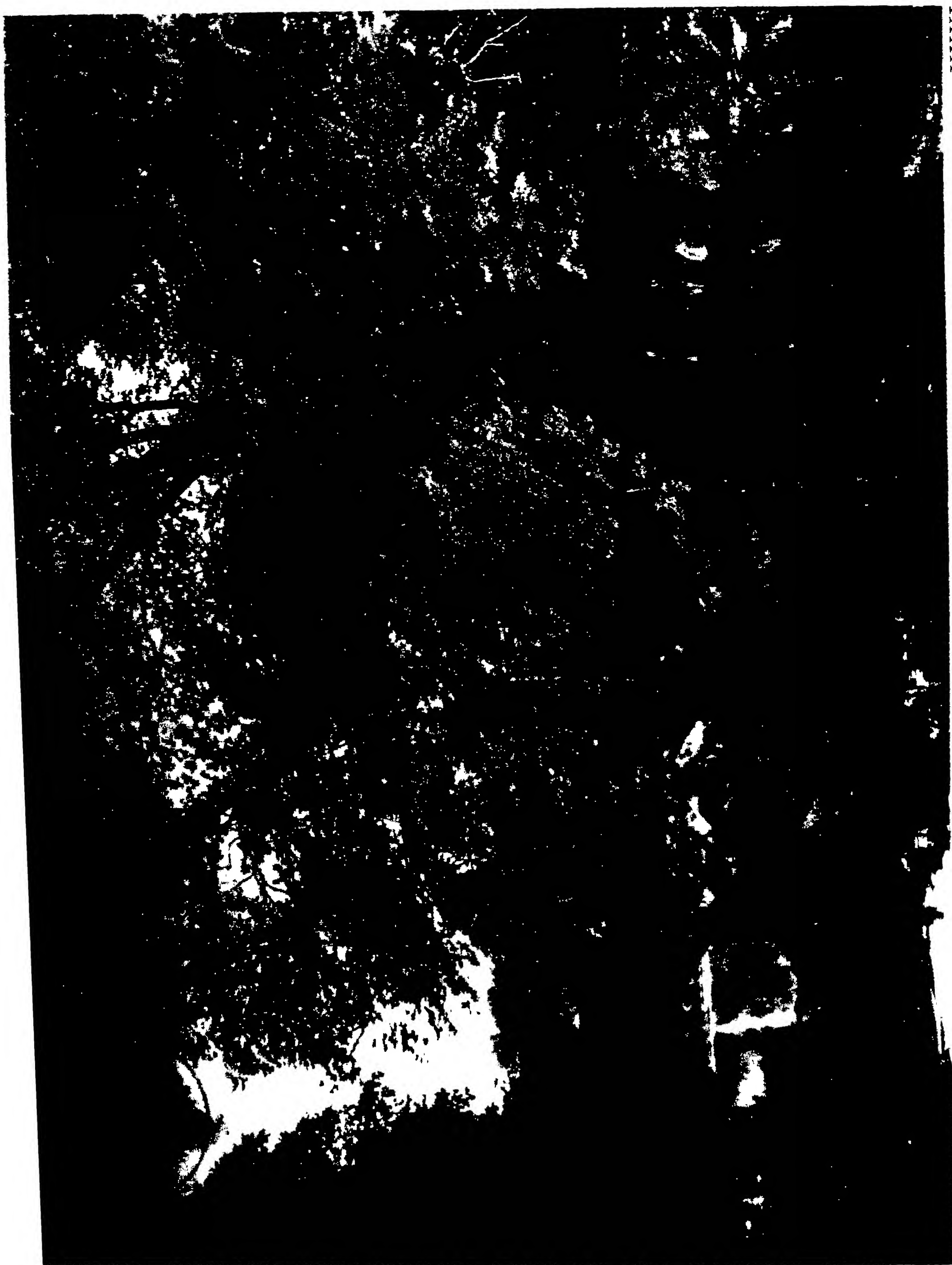
I find that in spinning from the reel in winter, where one brakes the revolving drum with a finger, that the hands get so cold and numb that the finger cannot accurately feel the drum, and over-runs become too frequent. This is so only on freezing days; but on quiet open days in February with longer afternoons and the assured promise of spring just round the corner there are worse amusements than a stroll alongside one's favourite river with a spinning rod.

Kingcups blossom usually before the cowslips in April, and may be the first splash of colour in the new herbage of the green meadows along with the lesser celandine which stars the water-side with the same brilliant yellow. It is interesting to speculate on these early spring colours. Why should the first blooms of the year be mostly white or yellow? The snowdrop is the first, followed quickly by kingcups, cowslips, celandine, coltsfoot, primroses, daffodils, and crocus (save the cultivated varieties) in quick succession, while the colours reflecting red rays delay their appearance till later. Of course, there are a few exceptions, but very few; the almond, cherry-plum and dog violets are out of keeping with the time. As the year progresses the yellows give way to all the other colours till autumn, when the leaves turn red and brown. Is this fanciful, or is there some reason for what is so obvious? Possibly it may be that as yellow is the brightest colour in poor light the yellow plants are more easily seen by fertilising insects.

This plate was exposed on a very dark, warm spring afternoon, and the keeper who was carrying my tripod wanted his tea. I had one plate unexposed and then it came on to rain. In desperation I covered my camera with my dark cloth, and seeing the nice curve of the bank with kingcups in the foreground, slewed the camera quickly round and went forward to where I knew that a figure was needed to complete the composition, telling the keeper to call one, two, three, and press the release; after which, hastily pushing the wet cloth into my pocket, rather than into the camera case, and quickly folding the instrument, we went home. It was so dark that, with a yellow filter at f. 16, a second was needful for even a rapid panchro. plate. And here is the picture. Observe how the light dead reeds stand out against the sombre dark background of the wood.

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XXX



The Nadder is a small river rising in the high ground above Tisbury and, flowing by Dinton and Burcombe runs through Lord Pembroke's estate at Wilton Park. The bridge forms his lower boundary, after which the Nadder is joined by the Wiley and forms the Bemerton Fishery, which extends as far as Bemerton, some two miles lower down. The river holds a fair number of trout, but is principally noted for the abundance of grayling. These are not looked on as "vermin" by the anglers—as in so many other trout streams—but are caught in good numbers in the late summer and autumn.

The picture is taken from the top of the "Fourteen Hatches," and the deep quiet pool above the hatches contrasts with the turmoil of broken water below. In the pool shown there are generally some trout moving; but if a fish is hooked from where the camera is standing it needs a long arm and a longer net to reach it, and even then one must lie prone on the boards and be handy with the net if one is to prevent the fish dashing under one through the hatches below. Friends of mine who have suffered a lost fish in this way tell me that the only safe method when a fish is hooked in this pool is to give slack line and let the fish have his way in the upper part of the water; then, to pull off line and race across the foot-bridge over the hatches to the left-hand side, scramble on to the left bank and so keep the fish from diving through the hatches—a risky and not easy job.

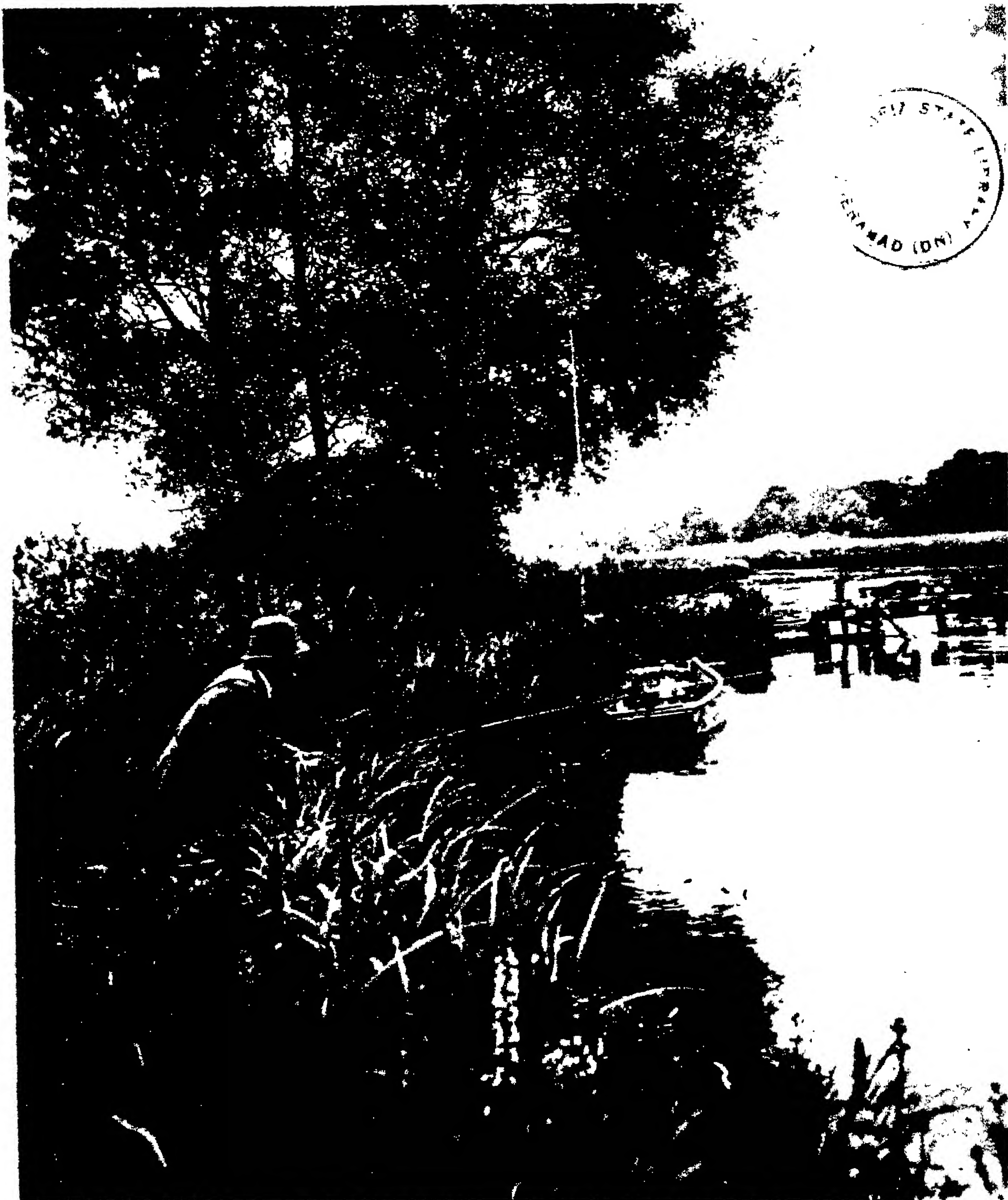
The picture was taken in late autumn, with the huge beeches as a falling curtain of gold and bronze against the grey stone bridge, on which I had to place a figure with his rod to give the size of the structure. My plate had to be very carefully screened in order to do justice to the shadows on the water and the details in the shade.

XXXII. COWS CROSSING THE NADDER

How the angler hates the cow! This beast seems endowed with every instinct by which to harass the fisherman. The curiosity complex is marked and, if quietly kneeling for any length of time without moving much, he becomes surrounded by inquisitive animals with outstretched necks slowly closing in round him. It is during the evening rise that they seem to be more of a nuisance than during the day, when they are mostly under the trees. But in the cool evening, with eased udders after milking, they take a peculiar delight in investigation and crowd round one, putting down any fish near, and causing the angler to employ language, perfectly justifiable under the circumstances, but which at any other time he would deprecate. During the day-time they tramp into the river, fouling the water for a long way downstream, thus warning the trout, which cease to rise. But where such nuisances exist I always carry with me a small but efficient catapult. For it is hopeless to wave one's rod at them, and unless one is armed with a catapult one must move elsewhere. The catapult is quite small, takes no room in one's pocket and, when needed, nothing can take its place. The cows, swans, ducks and horses, even the little boy who throws stones from the bridge at the fish to which one is casting, are all scared off by a few well-directed pellets.

The picture was taken at about 4 p.m. towards the sun—the only instantaneous one in the book. A few minutes before the exposure I was filling my bag with grayling from the shallows. Now, for half a mile, the water will be unfishable for half an hour at least while the grayling will have rushed up into the pool above.





XXXIII

XXXIII. AT THE EEL-POT BRIDGE AT LECKFORD

This picture was taken thirty years ago when the foot-bridge supported half a dozen eel traps. The old bridge has been rebuilt and no longer carries any traps. Here the angler is half smothered in rushes and has no need to kneel to be unseen. The disadvantage in kneeling lies in the fact that, with tall herbage behind, the line in the back cast is far more likely to be caught up, especially if one has to cast a long cast as so often occurs on broad water like the Test. Hence it is that any rod less than 9 ft. 6 in. becomes a constant source of annoyance to an angler who has to recover his back cast so frequently. The 8 ft. fairy rods on water with reeds, standing eight and ten feet high just behind one, cannot be used, and if the angler has to kneel, his rod will not reach higher than the growth of herbage behind him. Therefore, and also because he often has to make long casts, a 10-ft. rod has many advantages when fishing broad rivers with reeds behind, and these cut back hardly more than a few feet. When I hear of men using short rods I know that they fish on narrow streams or open water where the back cast has not to be considered.

It is strange how much heat can be engendered between neighbouring owners of fisheries on the subject of eels and traps; for eels can be a very remunerative traffic. There is a great demand in London for them, and in the season great quantities are sent up there. I recall twenty years ago where one owner of traps was entirely in the hands of his upstream neighbour for the flow of water through them, that friction became so acute that sparks ensued, ending in fire which did not allow them to speak to one another, and their keepers competed in mutual reprisals; though both owners were of the gentlest character.

XXXIV. AN INTERRUPTED LUNCH

There is a vast difference between the lunch of an angler and that of the shooter of game birds. And the reason is not difficult to find. When one is shooting, a time-table is kept, and the guns meet at a certain time at a pre-arranged place. Hence, the sportsman can sit down to a quiet meal of varied dishes. But the angler, whose lunch depends on what he is willing to carry in his bag, has no special time for food, this being entirely dependent on the time of the hatch of fly and the caprice of the fish. The angler's drink is often a question. He cannot drink the river water—or rather should not—and this means dragging about a bottle or a flask, or both. To carry a bottle is worse than a nuisance and lumbers up the bag, and I have discarded it long ago. The easiest way to carry water for the day is to imbibe a full pint before starting. It may seem a long drink directly after breakfast, but it smothers any troublesome thirst till tea-time; that is unless the cook puts mustard into the sandwiches. That is entirely the angler's fault for not warning her. If my host's cook puts in any mustard, my sandwiches go into the nettles, for I would far rather go hungry all day than thirsty. One cannot fish if one is very thirsty.

How often it is after a blank morning that the moment one sits down to one's snack the fish begin to move. It was this that occurred on the Bemerton water late one August when I was after the grayling. The moment I sat on the seat seen in the picture they began, and in the end I gave up lunch and settled down to a good afternoon's sport.

Let the artist observe the beauty of the foreground of seeding thistles, beloved of the goldfinches, the lovely shapes of the branches of the wych elm beyond the angler, and let him envy us fishing amid such lovely surroundings.



XXXX



XXXV. AT BURCOMBE ON THE NADDER

I was staying at the little Nadder Vale Hotel with my old friend G. E. M. Skues for some May-fly fishing on the Nadder, for there is often in most seasons a good hatch on this little river, when the bigger trout show up well. But after June is over, the gorged fish are lazy and quiet and not too willing to be interested in any seductions of the angler till September, when the anticipation of spawning stimulates an appetite to make provision for arduous days.

It was a wild and windy day when I took this picture, so windy and wet that I was in two minds as to whether or not to bring along my camera; for to add to my fishing impedimenta a stand-camera and legs requires some confidence in adequate results. But I was glad that I did so, as the wind went down about one o'clock, and as I crossed the iron bridge at Burcombe I saw on the upstream side the view here depicted. A figure was needed to give an interest to the subject, but I had no one to press the shutter release. Luckily, two boys from the neighbouring school came along and for a few coppers I engaged the elder to assist me. I told him to release when I gave a shout, and after getting through a fence and scrambling down a bank I stood on the little wooden bridge over the hatch. The stone work would have been a fine study for an artist in colour, for the lichen was all tones from a buttercup yellow to a warm burnt-sienna tint, and the bright green of the pollarded willows in the middle distance made a lovely background. The lad was most intelligent, and I got my picture—as you see.

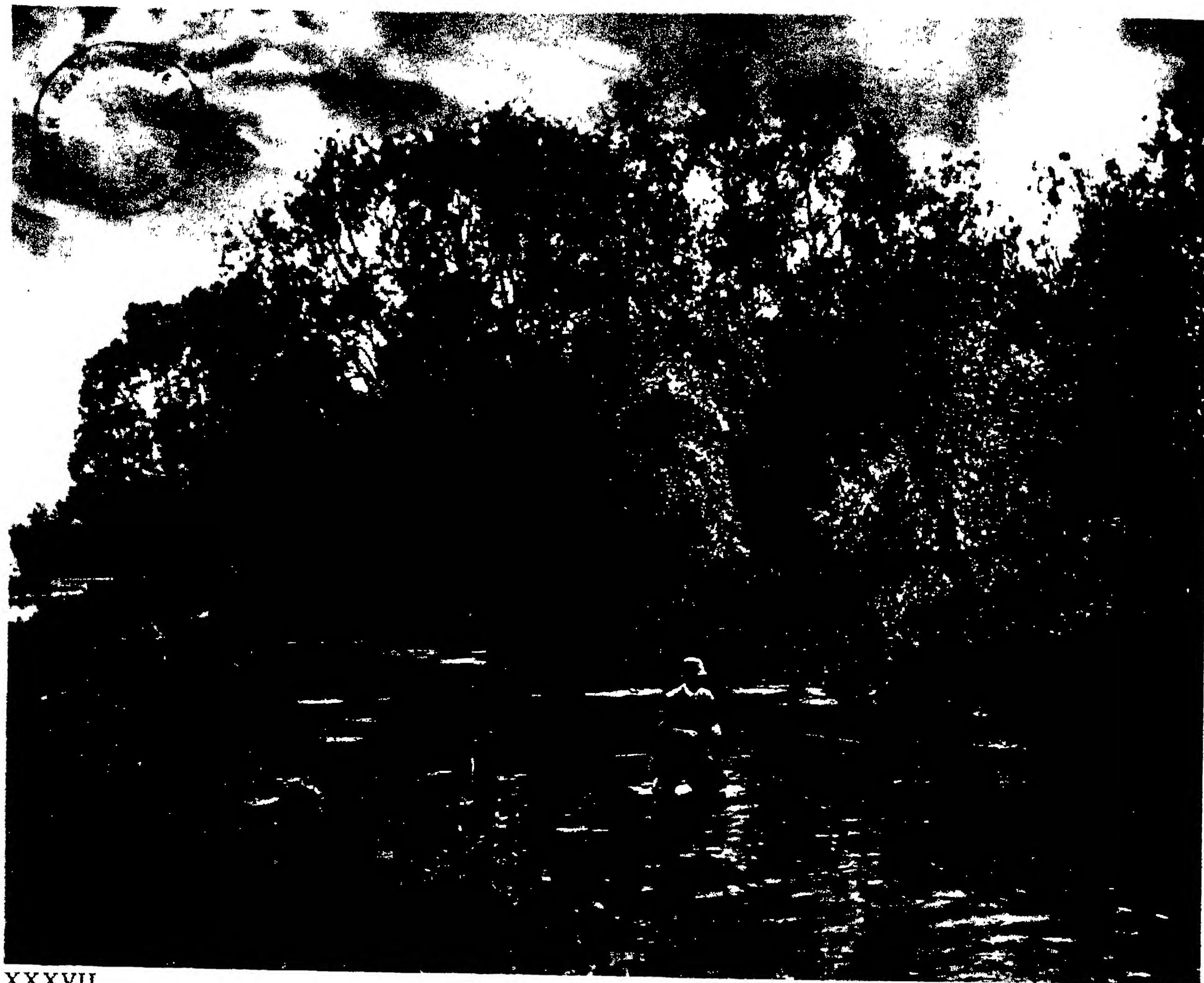
XXXVI. THE CANAL BRIDGE OVER THE FRAYS, UXBRIDGE

The Frays is a side stream of the Colne, and leaves the river below Denham to rejoin it below Uxbridge. The Grand Junction Canal follows the Colne for some miles, but as it approaches Denham it is on a higher level; and though the canal itself does not cut the Colne, the Frays—a stream of quite considerable size—passes beneath the canal. In old days, forty years ago, the Colne and the Frays were full of trout.

The picture shows an angler on the canal tow-path above the bridge. This has two stout arches to carry the immense weight of the water above it. One arch only is seen. The bridge-rail too is very strong and is painted white, or the sleepy tow-horse in the dusk might not see the path and fall into the water beneath. We are facing upstream, where on the other side of the bridge is a pool in which were some very fine trout, but these would back down beneath the arch if the angler were any larger than invisible.

Up to quite recent years there still remained a few streams within ten miles of London where a dry fly could be cast with some success, for the Colne and the Frays, and on the south side the Wandle, held a fair head of fish. But now, like many other rivers these have become poisoned and sterilised, from now on and for ever, from the waste products of mills and factories on their banks. And what has happened to these rivers must eventually happen to most if not all our chalk streams, for commerce must take precedence over sport, and no combination of riparian owners could afford the cost of preserving their waters pure. Thus do I feel that these pictures are in a way historical, and will be looked on in the future rather wistfully, just as we treasure the old sporting prints of our forefathers.





XXXVII

XXXVII. ON A TEST TRIBUTARY

Here we see a short reach of a tributary of the Test where the water flows swiftly before joining the main river half a mile below. The water here is fairly shallow—about eighteen inches to three feet in the pools. But under either bank there are plenty of fish of about a pound, though on the day on which this picture was taken I had a trout of one and a half pounds from under the big overhanging willow at the bend below the angler. The time is afternoon in mid-July, and as in this part of the water there is no May-fly the fishing is good all the summer through. Out of sight and behind the camera are seated in the grass a few school children, vastly excited, to whom now and then the angler threw a fish—to their intense delight; for he had quite as many as he needed, indeed his bag is dragging in the water due to his careless omission to hoist it higher under his armpit when wading.

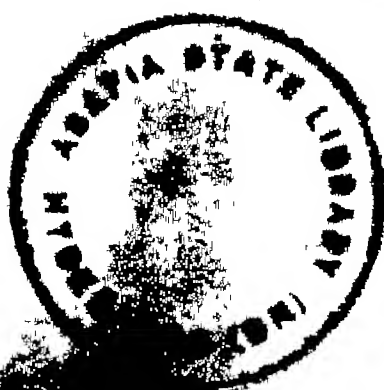
As far as the composition of the picture goes, the angler here forms the main theme, and illuminated as he is by the light falling between the opening in the trees he is a conspicuous object. The time was afternoon, in a place “where it seemed always afternoon” to me, for whenever I have fished up that stretch the sun shone, the fish rose, and I never wade to the top end with an empty bag. Such are my memories of this hallowed spot; but, were I to identify it, soon the field would be desecrated by broken bottles, greasy paper, and all the evidences of the modern disregard of decency.

XXXVIII. FOURTEEN HATCHES ON THE NADDER

Here are seen the grayling shallows below Wilton Bridge. In the middle distance is Fourteen Hatches, one of the most beautiful spots on the Nadder. Why it should be needful to have fourteen large hatches on such a small river was never clear to me till I learned that the very broad valley through which the Nadder runs is quite flat, and becomes easily flooded, and that unless the water is quickly drained off into the Avon at Salisbury the floods can extend over square miles of fields. I have seen such floods, when even the great hatches, running like Teddington weir, were unable to cope with the immense excess of the water coming down. Then it was that the roads were under water between Bemerton and Salisbury, and the whole valley was like a vast lake with the trees and farm roofs standing out of the water. Below the hatches the water has scoured out a deep pool of about half an acre, at the lower end of which the gravel shelves up to shallows only a foot or two deep. On these shallows the grayling rise eternally, and though but small, one may fill a bag with ten-inch fish in a short time on a good grayling day.

In examining the picture it will be seen that in a subject of this kind, where the foreground is brilliantly illuminated against a dark background, it is wise for the photographer to focus the foreground sharply and to slightly blur the distance, thereby avoiding the pin-sharp glitter from the leaves. The large cloud over the dark trees helps the composition. One important point in taking a picture where the tripod legs are in soft mud is to be careful that none of the legs are slowly sinking in the mud, resulting when the plate is developed either in a foreground, and nothing else, or tree-tops all askew.





How I wish that I could put into colour a picture such as faces this page! It was taken in the latter end of May on a Test tributary. In the foreground are the young growing reeds, very green—like most young things human and herb—through which the brilliant kingcups show up in bright contrast. The white plants behind the figure against the dark shadows of the willows; the light yellow of dead reeds across the water, and over all the great massed clouds passing across the sun the shadows of which trail over the landscape beyond or veil the picture in luminous shade, painted for me that day a picture that will never fade. I exposed the plate when the sun was shining in order to emphasise the contrasting shadows.

This stream is full of trout and small grayling which rise all day long, the trout with few exceptions running to about a short pound, and so innocent that they will take anything offered unless outrageously unlike any familiar food. For when a small stream is overhung by many trees the choice of menu must be a generous one. The caterpillars and polywigs and all creeping things which inhabit trees fall into the water giving great variety of rations, and in consequence the fish are fat as butter. But sometimes when the cut weeds are coming down they form a mass against the weed rack in the foreground. Then it is that the nymphs, driven from their homes in the weeds, form a filling repast to the wise trout which collect beneath the floating weed-raft. On such occasions have I crawled up the bank opposite and by dropping a well-soaked nymph just on the edge of the weeds been rewarded by a great fight to prevent my fish dashing down the big hatch only a foot below the end of the rack.

XL. AN AWKWARD CAST

This picture was taken in mid-June, when the elder is in full flower and the big burdock leaves have grown to their largest size. It represents a small bridge over a tributary of the Test close by Fullerton, the design of which is somewhat original. The stream is flowing under the arch from left to right, and the angler is vainly trying to interest a fish with its head rather too far under the arch for him to cast his fly upstream of him. Also the angler is attempting to cast with his right hand instead of using his left, by which he would be less likely to be caught up behind. But casting amidst all that tall herbage is no easy matter, and if, as is pretty likely, he will be caught up behind, he will put his fish down to a certainty if he has to crawl out to disconnect his fly from the trees and bushes just behind him. As it was, he crept over the bridge-rail and squatted down amongst the burdock leaves, and incidentally never got the fish at all.

On such an occasion as this the back-hand cast is a poor substitute for the use of the left hand, which all anglers should be able to use at a pinch. Perhaps one of the valuable uses of the left hand occurs when two men are both fishing from a boat, one in the bow and the other in the stern, with the gillie rowing between them. If both anglers are fishing right-handed it is obvious that one of them must recover his line between him and the gillie, and thus not so infrequently hook the poor wretch with one of the many flies on his cast. This is especially likely to happen if the wind is flukey. But if such angler can use his left hand his cast is kept far away from the rower. It becomes very tiring to back-hand cast for any length of time. Thus, I strongly urge beginners to teach their left hand equally with their right.





XLI. CHARLES COTTON'S FISHING HOUSE, AND HIS MEMORIAL TABLET

Charles Cotton, one of the earliest fathers of fly-fishing, wrote—as we all know—the portion on fly-fishing included in Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*. This was added after some editions of the original book had been published. Though Cotton was much younger than Walton, and differed from Walton in so many ways, yet the two became such friends that Walton adopted Cotton as his son. Cotton lived at Beresford Dale in Derbyshire on the river Dove, which he calls “the finest trout river in the Kingdom.” By its banks he built a fishing-house, a square stone building, over the door of which is let in a stone giving the date, 1674. Beneath the stone is the key-stone of the arched entrance, on which is cut the entwined initials of Walton and Cotton which has been reproduced in the Memorial below the script. Cotton was buried in St. James's Church, Piccadilly, in 1687.

It was primarily at the suggestion of Mr. Eric Taverner that some memorial should be erected to Cotton, and I was deputed to undertake this work. I had a free hand as to design and all details. I took much trouble together with the College of Heralds and the Society of Antiquaries to get a correct coat of arms for the cartouche; but the latter claimed that Cotton was not entitled to the crest—a dove—and to but a single achievement of the arms. It was considered wise to have an oval cartouche rather than a shield. The three charges, two above and one below the chevron, show spools of cotton, apparently punning on his name. The Memorial is cast in metal supported on Hopwood stone, and is erected in the Baptistery where it still stands—one of the three remaining memorials in the now ruined church. It was consecrated by the Bishop of London. After the ceremony, and in the vestry, while in full vestments and mitre, the kindly Bishop, himself a good angler, spread his arms to show me the size of a salmon he had caught recently, telling me that he wished I had been by his side to help him gaff it.

I am unable to get a good photograph of the Memorial as it is now, for though still attached to the wall and uninjured amongst the ruins of the church, the bell which had fallen into the Baptistery blocks any erection of camera-stand. I therefore offer a reproduction of an illustration of the tablet from the Summer number of the *Journal of the Fly-fishers Club* for 1937.

XLII. BELOW THE MILL, NEAR ANDOVER

Below one of the oldest mills in Hampshire—that county of mills—runs the water from the overflow spill-weir which lets down the water when the mill is not running. This stream holds grayling in quantity, and being a very private piece of fishing no mention as to its identity is permitted. Otherwise the exquisite beauty of the surroundings would be advertised, and hence destroyed by folk who would trespass, leaving behind all the sad and offensive evidences of their lack of consideration. It is sad, and alas one of the many curses that we endure as the result of the discovery of the internal combustion engine that it conveys people from towns who would only be rude if told that they were trespassing; and the penalty for trespassing cannot be upheld in law unless wilful damage can be proved. To leave paper, broken glass, scraps of victuals, and cigarette cartons in the grass cannot constitute “wilful damage”; and hence it is safer not to advertise beauty spots and, if permission to photograph is accorded, not to injure property by publishing the exact position.

Here we see an angler who has come down from town during a hectic life of strenuous and insistent duties to find for a few days the utter peace of the only sport he loves. Knee deep in the clear stream with the sound of falling water in his ears, with the certainty of sport—for behold his bag with already something in it—and with the view of the ancient mill, mentioned in Domesday Book, within fifty yards of him—What could a man want more?





XLIII. THORNEY WEIR FISHERY HOUSE

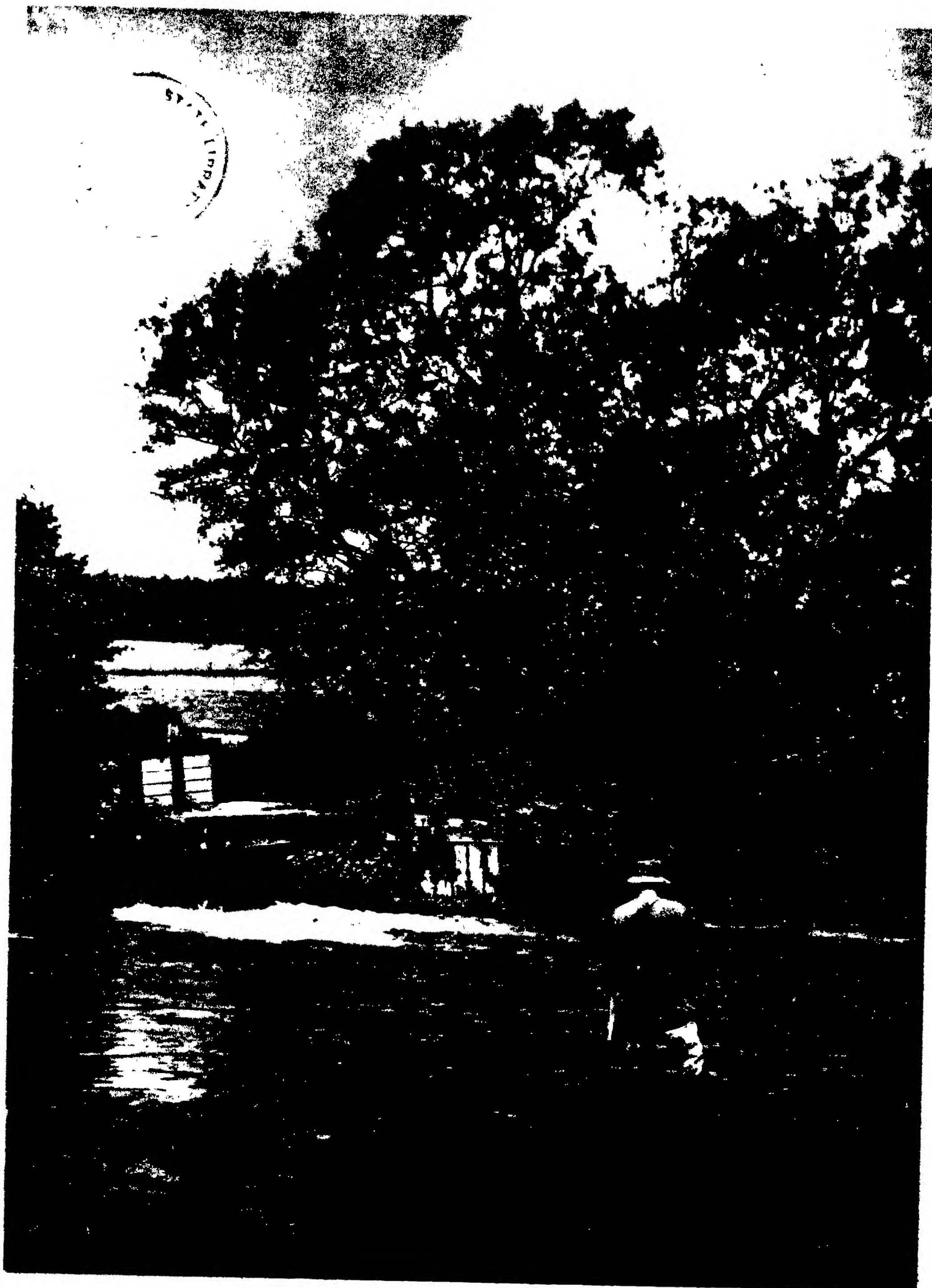
This house is hidden by trees from the main Great Western Railway which runs just behind it before crossing the Colne by a bridge of some size. It was the meeting house of many famous fishermen in past days. Behind the house are the stews and fish-ponds where trout were reared for stocking what was then a noted portion of the Colne. But the water has become more and more polluted and the fishery has gradually deteriorated.

Some years before 1914 the fishery was rented by a German, Hermann by name, who raised fish in the stews to a weight of between two and four pounds, feeding them on liver and horse flesh. These he turned down into the river, charging two pounds a day for the fishing. Then, by using a large floating fly the colour of liver, the angler was able to hook some of these large fish before they fell away in condition from starvation. For to rear trout by artificial feeding to that size and then turn them loose into the river and expect them to fend for themselves when there was not much to feed on, is equivalent to transferring a fat gourmand into an Indian forest and hoping for the best. But the very hungry fish snatched at anything distantly resembling liver or meat, and hence the "sport" was quite good. Lord Charles Beresford enjoyed many days here, as did other rich anglers who were ignorant as to what constituted "sport." But it was not by chance that a German took the house within two hundred yards of a bridge carrying the main G.W.R., and he, together with a certain German Count, who lived very close by, was found safer lodging by the authorities the moment that war was declared in 1914.

XLIV. ON THE ITCHEN BELOW WINCHESTER

Below Winchester the Itchen supplies the canal no longer in use. But the old towing path is open to the public and is a pleasant walk at any time of the year. The picture is taken at an overflow from the canal into the main Itchen near Hockley Farm on the road to Eastleigh where the canal footpath crosses over the hatch. Here there are some fine fish, most difficult to catch, for they lie along the camp sheathing just beyond the white water, and one's fly is whisked away by the rapid rush of the water. The angler in the picture has waded into the middle of the pool. This is always a problem of pilotage, for how to get there is known to few but the keeper, as there are deep holes with alpine ridges of shallows between them. Therefore the keeper standing on the bank takes his bearings and calls out "One step to the right" or "Two to the left," as the case may be. Otherwise the angler is up to his middle at one false step.

Fishing a swiftly running pool with a dry fly must always be difficult, for drag is sure to occur at some portion of the fly's course unless this is a very short one. Hence it is that accuracy in placing the fly is essential, and the moment that the fly is safely past the fish it should be snatched off the water. The water wrinkles disguise any quick movement of the gut in withdrawing the fly; but no fish will tolerate a floating fly which skates over its nose leaving a tiny wake behind it.





XLV. WATER MEADOWS OF THE LOWER ITCHEN

The Itchen takes second place only to the Test in the abundance of its fish life and the luxuriance of its water meadows. Above Winchester no doubt the fishing is better, for the riparian owners are very conservative and take a great interest in the upkeep of their waters. Below Winchester through some miles of its course the Itchen divides and breaks into smaller streams which water the broad meadows between them. This portion of the old canal to Southampton, now long out of use since the railways monopolised the traffic, was supplied by the Itchen; but now, instead of being still and locked water, what was the canal carries a current and consequently adds to the extent of fishable water.

The broad water meadows separated by these intersecting streams are wonderfully beautiful, and as so many dairy farms are dotted up and down the valley, their large herds of cows are fed on the luxuriant growth of long grass. On the ever damp ground this growth is so rapid that more than one crop of hay can be cut in the year, and the exuberance of the flowering plants in spring-time tint acres of meadows with their bloom. The picture shows a board bridge over a small carrier, and is taken from a right-of-way path to the canal from the main road above Hockley Farm. The beech clump on St. Cross hill is seen in the distance.

XLVI. A SIDE STREAM ON THE MISBOURNE

The Misbourne is a small river rising in the Chilterns above Amer-sham, and flowing past Chalfont, joins the Colne at Uxbridge. Here we see a shallow carrier at its junction with the main stream above the bridge which carries the road over the water above Denham, beyond the edge of the field in the distance. I hear that this carrier has lately been deepened and its mud removed, and is now part of the main river. The picture was taken twenty years ago in the autumn when the chestnut leaves are golden and yellow, making a gorgeous carpet in the foreground. The figure in the punt was a notable personage, for Winchester had been for fifty years the keeper of the renowned Denham Fishery on the Colne in the heyday of its fame. When the Fishery house was sold with what remained of the fishing after the river had been poisoned, he was taken on by those who owned the Denham bit of the Misbourne.

Winchester was full of good tales of the past. He related to me how on one occasion Adelina Patti and her husband came down to lunch with General Good lake who lived at the Fishery house and owned the fishing. During lunch a friendly bet was made between Patti and her husband as to who should catch the best bag of fish after lunch. Winchester was given charge of Adelina while her husband went off with the General. Whether Adelina crossed Winchester's palm with gold is a secret: but anyway Winchester took her to the stews, and baiting her hook with meat gave Adelina a glorious time. When she met her husband he was astounded at her success, but Adelina was delighted at the quantity of fish in the water, and the eagerness with which they came to the "fly."





XLVII. WIND IN THE WILLOWS; ABBOT'S BARTON
ON THE ITCHEN

Here is a portion of the side stream of the Itchen on Mr. Skues' water above Winchester where an aqueduct is carried from the main river across the side stream to fill the runnels which irrigate the big meadows across the water. The fishing is one that Mr. Skues has fished for fifty years, the details of which are enshrined in his charming angling books. Here we see him squatting in the grass, casting to a fish in the broken shallow water. The picture was taken on a wild and windy day, for in this valley and on this very exposed water there never seems a quiet day without wind, at any rate whenever it has been my good fortune to fish with him. On this occasion I was caught by the beautiful curves of the white under-leaves as they turned in the wind. Thus, waiting for this to occur and calling to Mr. Skues in order to make him turn his head at the instant, I got my picture.

As he is a master of the dry fly, his water, though full of big fish, has had removed from it all trout with the smallest trace of indiscretion, leaving only those of super-piscine wariness. But he would return in the evening with a couple of brace, while I should be fortunate with a single fish in the day, and often had I come home with quite an empty bag. It is on this water that he pursued his investigations into the art of using the nymph, which is fully described in his books. It was an education to fish with him, for he seemed to know instinctively the most likely fly to use; but he surprised me often by what appeared to be a reckless exposure of himself when casting. And yet I never saw him put down his fish as I should have done had I stood upright as he sometimes did, or only sat on a seat-stick, instead of crawling, as I was wont to do when addressing those desperately shy fish.